

# RANDOM HOUSE TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

## Singing Home the Whale

Mandy Hager

**The intriguing story of a troubled boy who protects a baby whale that locals believe is threatening their livelihood.**

Will Jackson is hiding out; a city boy reluctantly staying with his uncle in small town New Zealand while struggling to recover from a brutal attack and the aftermath of a humiliating YouTube clip gone viral.

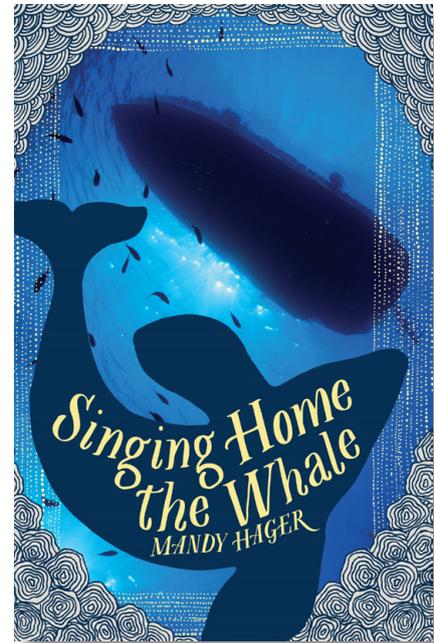
After discovering a young, abandoned orca whale, Will's life is further thrown into chaos as he rallies to help protect the orca against hostile, threatening interests. His actions threaten to tear apart the small fishing community and forever change Will's life.

The boy and the whale develop a special bond, linked by Will's love of singing.

*Singing Home the Whale* is an exciting, plot-driven story, full of drama, tension and romance.



**Mandy Hager** is a Wellington writer and educator. She won the NZ Post Children's Book Award for Young Adult Fiction in 2010 for *The Crossing*.



### SPECIFICATIONS:

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Format: Paperback  
Extent: 352pp  
Readership: 13+

### RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Before Reading
- Close Reading
- Style and Technique
- Characters
- Themes
- Creative Responses
- Research Topics
- Reading List

Price (GST inclusive) and author details are correct at the time of writing but are subject to change without notice.



# Before Reading

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1. What does the cover image suggest about the book's content?
2. When and where might the story be set?
3. What does the title suggest to you about the storyline?

# Close Reading

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## Chapter One

1. What do the opening paragraphs suggest about the nature of our first narrator? What is different about this narrator compared to those of other novels you have read? (p. 4)
2. Who are described as the 'Hungry Ones'? Why is this title used? (p. 5)
3. What is the significance of the name 'The Chronicle'? (p. 6)

## Chapter Two

1. What is your first impression of Gabby Taylor? How does her tone when addressing Will convey this impression? (p. 8)
2. What does the locals' reaction to Will's hometown establish about the setting? (p. 8)
3. How does Will's attitude towards his appearance show his refusal to succumb to peer pressure? (p. 9)
4. What does Will's reaction toward Gabby seeing the video tell us about his past? (p. 10)

## Chapter Three

1. Juxtaposition is the technique of

contrasting two separate ideas side by side. What imagery has the author used to juxtapose the moments before the whale's mother's death and the moments after? (pp. 16–17)

## Chapter Four

1. How does Will feel when he is sailing on the ocean? (p. 19)
2. Why had Will felt safe living in the small town of Blythe? What do you think he needed to feel safe from? (pp. 21–23)
3. What are Will's feelings towards social media? (p. 22) To what extent do you agree with this view? Explain your view of social media.
4. Will believes that the title of 'wandering minstrel' is apt for the state he is in. What do you think it means to be a 'wandering minstrel'? (p. 25)
5. What maternal action does Will take that makes the orca feel safe with him? (p. 25)

## Chapter Five

1. How does the orca show its affection towards Will? (p. 29)
2. 'Trust me, my friends, our kind were never meant to be alone.' Who do you think the narrator is referring to? Do you believe

it is one specific group, or living creatures as a whole? (p. 30)

3. How does Will differ from the narrator's typical view of the Hungry Ones? What are the connotations associated with the Hungry Ones? (p. 31)

### **Chapter Six**

1. What is your first impression of Dean's personality? Would you regard him as more of a realist or a pessimist? (pp. 35–36)
2. How is it shown that the video clip has psychologically affected Will? (p. 36)
3. How would you describe Will's relationship with his mother? (p. 37)
4. What do we learn about the nature of reality television talent shows? What do we learn about the power of mobile phones and websites such as YouTube? (p. 38)
5. What is the significance of the closing lines of the chapter: 'Put on your costume, and powder your face. The people pay to be here, and they want a laugh'? (p. 40)

### **Chapter Seven**

1. What emotions does the narrator convey throughout this chapter? (pp. 41–44)

### **Chapter Eight**

1. Why does Will name the orca 'Min'? What does this show about his musical knowledge? (p. 47)
2. How did Will respond to peer pressure in primary school? How does this compare to his response to peer pressure now? (p. 48)
3. In what ways does Will relate to Min? (p. 51)

4. How do Will and Dean's views on what is law and what is right differ? (p. 56)

5. Why does Pania's story make Will feel selfish? (p. 60)

6. What are the risks Will faces when he sneaks out to see Min again? Why do you think he ignores these risks? (p. 60)

### **Chapter Nine**

1. Describe the term 'fellowship foundering' in your own words. What does this tell us about the importance of kinship within the orcas? (p. 64)
2. Despite knowing that 'these Hungry Ones would choke upon our chosen early end', Min still chooses to play with Will. What does this tell us about Min's character? (pp. 64–65)
3. Why do you think that Min was wrong in believing that 'all was well' within his world? What do you think will happen next? (p. 65)

### **Chapter Ten**

1. Why do you think Will was so invested in his research on Orcas? (p. 67)
2. What does the First Nations tribe's actions show about their stance on preservation of the environment and of animals? (p. 68)
3. What is the 'old familiar tension' that boils in Will's gut? (p. 74)
4. Do you think that Will has the tendency to adopt the company of the lonely? What does he learn from these people? (p. 75)
5. How does Hunter's reaction to Will's video differ to that of others? What does this suggest about his personality? (pp. 76–78)

6. Why is it that gratitude filled Will's chest? What does this show about Will's relationship with Dean? (p. 80)
7. How is life in Blythe different to life in the city? (p. 83)
8. What does Hunter see in Min? Is there something he hopes to gain from this experience? Explain why you think this. (p. 84)

### Chapter Eleven

1. What are the similarities between a pod of orcas and a human tribe? (p. 87)
2. Min claims that 'it was too late to turn it back'. What does this mean, and what do you think will happen next? (p. 89)

### Chapter Twelve

1. Numerous Maori words are used in this chapter. Write a glossary listing them all and find definitions of those you do not know.
2. How does Will relate to the newspaper headlines? (p. 93)
3. What were Will's worries about asking the whanau for help with Min? What do we learn about the nature of Bruce Godsill? (pp. 94–95)
4. Why does the whanau take Will's request seriously, when Dean wouldn't? (pp. 98–101)
5. What does Dean think Will is doing in spending time with Min? What are your thoughts on this? (p. 104)
6. Why would Bruce still care, even if Min was kept away from his salmon farm? (p. 105)
7. What do you think causes Dean's change of heart? (p. 107)

### Chapter Thirteen

1. How is Min used to convey the author's own opinion about the conservation of nature and the environment? What is the tone used in this chapter? (pp. 109–111)
2. How does Min's injury echo his mother's death? (p. 111)

### Chapter Fourteen

1. How does Gabby view Min? (p. 119)
2. What was Will's reaction upon hearing that his mother had sent Dean a copy of his school show? Why do you think that he reacted this way? (pp. 121–122)
3. What is your first impression of Harley Andrews? (pp. 123–124)
4. Why did Will feel a moment of 'intense jealousy' when Min rubbed up against Viv? (p. 126)
5. What does Viv insinuate about Harley's treatment of enforcing rules? What does this show about Harley's character? (p. 127)

### Chapter Fifteen

1. This chapter is titled 'Only Haters Feed on Hate'. What do you think this means, and how does it apply to the storyline so far? (p. 130)
2. How do different characters relate to Min's wisdom that 'falling is only fatal when one fails to find the strength to float back up'? (p. 131)
3. Why is it that Min's 'Song Boy' is rare, but not unique? Which characters prove this? (p. 133)

## Chapter Sixteen

1. What does the Tit Willow song represent in Will's life? (p. 136)
2. How is Pania different to other girls Will knows? (p. 137)
3. Why did Will believe that Hunter's personality contrasted with his appearance? What does this tell us about Hunter's nature? (p. 138)
4. Why do you think Pania feels that it's better to be Gabby's friend than her enemy? Can the same be said for other characters within the novel? (p. 141)
5. What does Will learn about Hunter's past? (pp. 142–143)
6. What does Gabby do that angers Will? Why do you think Gabby's exploitation of Min strikes particularly close to home for Will? (pp. 146–148)

## Chapter Seventeen

1. How does the weather reflect Min's emotions? (p. 154)

## Chapter Eighteen

1. Why is Harley quick to keep Hunter out of the conflict? (p. 158)
2. What was Hunter and Pania's cunning plan? How does Will feel about this plan, and why? (pp. 164–165)
3. What are your views on the cliché, 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'? Do you believe Will's hardships have made him stronger? (p. 172)

## Chapter Nineteen

1. How are the 'Beings' and the Hungry Ones similar? (p. 176)

## Chapter Twenty

1. Why do you think Will chose to sing *Amazing Grace*? What is the significance of this song? (p. 181)
2. Why does Hunter make a big deal of checking the camera? (p. 183)
3. How has Bruce affected Hunter over the years? What are Dean's thoughts on this? (p. 184)
4. What is the significance of the term 'night vigil' in describing Will's nighttime swims with Min? (p. 185)
5. What is it that pushes Will to go to the concert? (p. 187)
6. What does Will discover about Min's family? How does this make him feel? (p. 189)
7. What admission does Will make upon Bruce's arrival? Why does he have to make this admission, and what does this tell us about his personality? (p. 195)

## Chapter Twenty-one

1. Why does Min find it difficult to hold onto the hate for the Hungry Ones? (p. 199)

## Chapter Twenty-two

1. What offer does Dean make to Hunter, and why does this make Hunter emotional? (p. 204)
2. Why does Will worry about Min in this chapter? (p. 206)
3. What does Dean realise when he learns that Bruce gave everyone the day off? What does this mean for Will and Min? (p. 211)
4. How is tension built throughout this chapter?

### **Chapter Twenty-three**

1. How did Min feel while watching the conflict from the water? (pp. 220–221)

### **Chapter Twenty-four**

1. Why is Will disbelieving upon hearing of how the authorities have turned a blind eye to Bruce's violence? What does this tell us about the difference in lifestyle in a small town such as Blythe? (pp. 223–224)
2. What is it that connects Will, Hunter and Min once more? (p. 234)
3. Will comments on the importance of perspective. To what extent do you agree with his comments? (p. 235)
4. What does Gabby reveal to Will? Do you think she shows a change in character, or something else? (p. 237)
5. What claim does Hunter make that shows his determination and support of Will? (p. 243)

### **Chapter Twenty-five**

1. How is the tradition of the orcas similar to the passing of New Zealand tradition? (p. 245)
2. Explain, in your own words, what is meant by the words 'we each make of our own lives what we will'. (p. 246)

### **Chapter Twenty-six**

1. How does Pania react to Will's plan? What does this tell us about her feelings towards Will? (p. 249)
2. Earlier in the novel, Will indicated his want to live a life of anonymity. How does his ocean voyage relate back to this? Do you think he will have achieved this goal, or strayed further from it? (p. 255)

3. What worries of Will's were resurrected while boating towards Kaikoura? (p. 259)
4. What frightened Will once he had reached the viewpoint? What state of mind do you think he would have been in by this stage? (p. 261)
5. How did both Min and Will feel about letting go of each other? (p. 262)

### **Chapter Twenty-seven**

1. How does Min feel about leaving his Song Boy? Why does he feel more loyal to his underwater family than to Will? (p. 266)

### **Chapter Twenty-eight**

1. What is unexpected about the way the police treat Will? (p. 269)
2. Why do you think Viv and Dean's views on Will's actions differ so profusely? Do you think this is due to their outlook, or to their priorities? (p. 271)
3. In your own opinion, why did Gabby post the clips on the Internet? (p. 272) Was it an act of repentance, or was it done for some other reason? Has this changed your opinion of Gabby in any way?
4. What does Viv see in Will's act of courage? Do you believe that Will's actions could have the same effect that Viv thinks they could? (pp. 275–276)
5. What does Bruce allege in the District Court that angers Will? (p. 279)
6. What is significant about how Hunter opens up to Will with such a personal story? (pp. 282–284)
7. How does Will feel about his father's offer? Why does he feel this way? (pp. 287–288)

## Chapter Twenty-nine

1. What are Min's feelings towards being with his 'first family' once more? (pp. 290–291)

## Chapter Thirty

1. What confession does Harley make? (pp. 293–294) What does this tell us about his personality? Do you think he has undergone a moral change throughout the novel, or does he simply side with the majority?
2. What is the public reaction to the clip of Will and Pania, and why does this shock Will? (p. 297)
3. Viv and Pania believe that the video clip has the ability to affect whaling policies worldwide. What does this tell us about the power of individuals taking action, even in a small New Zealand community? (p. 298)
4. In your own opinion, do you believe that Bruce could ever change? Explain why you have come to this conclusion. (pp. 300–302)
5. What is the connection that Min and Pania share? (p. 305)

## Chapter Thirty-one

1. What does it mean to be a 'Chronicle'? (p. 310)

## Chapter Thirty-two

1. How does Will feel about life in the spotlight? How can this view be applied to society today? (p. 313)
2. How has Hunter's confidence developed throughout the last year? What evidence is there for this? (pp. 317–319, 324)

3. Why does Pania push for the two of them to follow Min? How does Will react to this? (p. 320)
4. Why do you think that Will feels safe, despite being surrounded by the pod? (p. 327)

## Chapter Thirty-three

1. Despite all the changes that occur in Will, what is it that Min recognises stays the same in him? (p. 330)
2. What environmental issues does Min identify as spoiling the sea? (p. 331)
3. How does Min feel about death? (pp. 333–334)

# Style and Technique

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1. The publisher describes this novel as containing drama, tension and romance. How do you think *Singing Home the Whale* would be categorised on a library shelf? Are there multiple genres that this novel fits into?
2. This novel is written from two different characters' points of view — one human, and one animal. Are these two narrators equally as convincing? Why or why not?
3. There are two distinct writing styles used to characterise our two narrators. Compare and contrast the two different styles, and describe the effects these have on the plot and development of themes.
4. In what ways does Min's narrative evoke a sense of rhythm and poetry? Identify at least four features that support this.
5. To what extent do you believe that there is a certain need for the reader to 'suspend their disbelief' in order to embrace the full effects of this novel and its writing style?

# Characters

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1. Select four adjectives to describe each of the following characters:
  - Will
  - Min
  - Dean
  - Pania
  - Hunter
  - Bruce
  - Viv
  - Gabby
  - Harley
2. Write 400 words on the contrasting ways that different characters in the novel reacted to peer pressure. What do you think their reactions reveal about their personalities?
3. Who do you think underwent the biggest change throughout the novel? Select four key events in the novel that you think showed this change, and describe the effect such events had on the character.
4. Did your first impressions of the main characters prove to be true? Compare and contrast your initial feelings towards these characters to how you perceive them now.

# Themes

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1. Write a short paragraph on each of the following themes and how they are explored in *Singing Home the Whale*. Include a quote from the novel that you feel represents each theme.
  - The role of social networks in modern society
  - Escapism
  - Being true to oneself
  - The use and abuse of power
  - Family bonds
  - Environmentalism
  - Peer pressure
  - Advocating for the helpless
  - Attitudes towards abuse
  - Animal–human relationships
  - Justice
2. A well-known saying tells us that ‘it takes a village to raise a child.’ What are your thoughts on how this applies, or doesn’t apply, to the town of Blythe? Do you think that the community feels responsible for the treatment of those within it, or does this responsibility lie with the individual families?
3. A prominent theme in the novel, intertwined with the idea of peer pressure, is that of the power of social networks. Construct a pros and cons list for social media websites such as YouTube and Facebook, and explain how each of these points applies to *Singing Home the Whale*.
4. The author explores the relationship between two unlikely friends, human and whale. This is a theme explored in a wide range of well-known novels. Do you believe that it is possible for humans to have a stronger connection with another species than with each other? Explain your views on this topic in the form of an oral presentation to your class.
5. Do you think that a sense of justice has been served by the end of the novel? Did Bruce get what he deserved?

# Creative Responses

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1. Write a newspaper article about Will returning Min to his family in the Kaikoura.
2. Create a playlist of songs that would suit different events throughout the novel. You may include songs referenced, as well as others songs you believe fit the mood or story.
3. Design a poster or pamphlet advertising Will's fundraiser concert. Think about adding some relevant facts and information for the people of Blythe, convincing them to support this cause.
4. Create a visual presentation (poster/ short film/animation) focusing on one of the themes in this novel.
5. What do you think could or should happen in the sequel to this novel? Write a one- to two-page outline of the plot for the sequel you would write. Be sure to include a possible title for this sequel.
6. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine or website. Alternatively, write a comparison between this novel and another with a similar plot or theme. See the reading list on the last page for suggestions.
7. Choose a chapter from the novel and turn it into a scripted drama or a comic strip. Present it to the class.
8. Write a diary entry from the point of view of any character, except Will or Min, for one significant event in the novel.

# Research Topics

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1. Watch the 2013 documentary *Blackfish* to research further into the treatment of sea creatures that are kept in captivity. Construct an opinion piece on this issue, demonstrating your own beliefs.
2. Min's storyline was inspired by, and dedicated to, a small orca named Luna. Research further into who Luna was and describe any clear connections you can draw between Min and Luna. For more on Luna, you can visit [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luna\\_%28killer\\_whale%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luna_%28killer_whale%29)
3. Will and Min are connected through their love of singing. Throughout the novel, the author references numerous songs from *The Mikado*. Research the meanings behind the following songs and comment on how they relate to aspects of the storyline:
  - *The Wandering Minstrel*
  - *Young Man Despair*
  - *See How The Fates Their Gifts Allot*
  - *The Sun Whose Rays Are All Ablaze*
  - *The Criminal Cried*
4. Friendships between animals and humans have been seen to flourish in an assortment of both fictional and non-fictional texts. Research real life cases of these friendships and then write your own short story based on one of these friendships.
5. Create a visual presentation (poster/ PowerPoint/Prezi) displaying facts about orcas and the orca population within New Zealand waters.
6. Have a class debate for and against banning the practice of keeping animals in zoos and aquariums. Alternatively, write an opinion piece on this topic.

# Reading List

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## Fiction

*Leaving Time* by Jodi Picoult  
*One Whale Singing* by Keri Hulme (short story)  
*The Island of Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell  
*The Silent One* by Joy Cowley  
*The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera

## Non Fiction

*Born Free* by Joy Adamson  
*My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell