

**TEACHERS
RESOURCES**

**ARE
YOU
THERE,
BUDDHA?**

PIP HARRY

Over one blistering summer, Bee will grow up, show up, and make a name for herself.

ARE YOU THERE, BUDDHA?

BY PIP HARRY

Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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INTRODUCTION

'Buddha says: 'Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon and the truth.' I'll keep watching Mrs Dark, to make sure I'm right.' (p 66)

This verse novel is a fresh, funny and very contemporary take on puberty, first periods and relationships from the CBCA Award-winning author Pip Harry.

Bridget 'Bee' Ballentine is 12 and starting her first year of high school in the beach suburb of Crescent Bay.

Still reeling from the departure of her mother for an ashram in India, Bee talks to Buddha and begs for her first period not to arrive. She's not ready to become a woman yet, whatever that means.

Although Bee's yet to find her tribe at school, her best friend forever is surfer Leon McKay, also known as the hottest boy in Year Eight. As long as Leon has her back, Bee can survive the mean girls, her meddling but kind-hearted stepmum, Kath, and her swimming nemesis, Laura Dark, The Piranha.

Then a new friend, Claire, arrives, just as Bee is accepted into the swimming team, and Bee's life begins to look brighter.

Over one blistering summer, set against the backdrop of bushfires, smoke haze and water restrictions, Bee will grow up, show up, and make a name for herself.

This touching and warm-hearted novel is from the author of *The Little Wave*, winner of the 2020 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers.

BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?
- After you have read the novel, read about Pip Harry in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Studies of Society and Environment, and English Language and Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT (SOSE)

PARENTAL LOSS

KEY QUOTE: ‘The thing about Mum is that she didn’t leave all at once. Even before the diving accident, she’d been leaving slowly – day by day, week by week.’ (p 180)

DISCUSSION POINT: Bee is suffering feelings of abandonment since her mother not only left the family to live in India five and a half years ago, but shows little interest in Bee’s life at all. She is approaching puberty and really needs her mother’s guidance, so feels resentful when Kath, her stepmum, offers it instead. Discuss her mother’s actions and reasons. Did you have any sympathy for her?

DISCUSSION POINT: Bee has a meltdown: ‘Why won’t she leave me alone? I already have a mum, I don’t need another one’ (p 17). Is Bee’s reaction typical of the feelings of many stepchildren?

DISCUSSION POINT: Her mother’s departure has impacted on Bee’s father as well: ‘Dad likes to check with parents and make sure any house I’m visiting doesn’t have hazards, like loose wires, open windows with a drop, or teenagers with tattoos. Since Dad was left to solo parent, he worries a lot.’ (pp 79–80) How difficult is the role of a sole parent?

PUBERTY

KEY QUOTE: ‘I know I can’t avoid it forever, you can’t beat biology. But I’m not ready to become a woman yet. I want a bit more time.’ (p 6)

DISCUSSION POINT: Bee deals with menstruation for the first time and Kath offers her sound advice. How important is it to have some sort of adviser in this crucial time of life?

DISCUSSION POINT: What other aspects of puberty is Bee having trouble confronting?

COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE

KEY QUOTE: ‘I don’t feel like a shark, I feel like a goldfish. It’s time I stopped going around in circles, in my cramped bowl, and swam into the big, open ocean.’ (p 210)

DISCUSSION POINT: Bee feels different to most of her classmates and prefers to fly under the radar instead of making any statements of independence. But as the novel progresses she realises that sometimes you have to stand up for what you really believe in. Is she likely to be more forceful in future?

DISCUSSION POINT: How does Bee mature in the course of this novel?

PEER GROUP PRESSURE

KEY QUOTE: 'Buddha says: 'A wise man can always be found alone; a weak man can always be found in a crowd.' Maybe if I want real GRL PWR I'll have to go back to being alone.' (p 145)

DISCUSSION POINT: Bee is briefly befriended by 'cool' girl Sara but realises that such a friendship comes with a cost. For Sara is only interested in friends who follow her lead in everything. How difficult is it to cope at school when there is often pressure to 'fit in'?

DISCUSSION POINT: 'This year, everyone is trying so hard to be cool they've forgotten to have fun.' (p 150) Discuss with students whether they have found that their teenage years have made it more difficult to have fun.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

KEY QUOTE: 'Dad and Kath are agnostic, which means they don't know if God exists or not. Even so, Kath says she supports my beliefs one hundred per cent, and that everyone could do with a little enlightenment.' (p 4)

DISCUSSION POINT: This novel is peppered with quotations from Buddha. Bee's mum has gone to India to follow that religion and Claire's mother Jane teaches meditation at her local centre. Bee has adopted the religion as a sort of tribute to her absent mother. Study some of the history and teachings of Buddha and discuss how they relate to this novel.

DISCUSSION POINT: How important is it to have a knowledge of comparative religions? How important are religious beliefs in your life?

CLIMATE CHANGE & THE ENVIRONMENT

KEY QUOTE: 'On the news there's footage of more fires up the coast, the air choked with smoke. Charred buildings and houses, where there were once holiday towns. People are getting evacuated with a few suitcases. Leaving behind their whole lives.' (p 125)

DISCUSSION POINT: The novel includes many references to Bee's concern about climate change and to the dangers posed to our environment. Is this something which troubles you as well?

DISCUSSION POINT: Greta Thunberg is Claire's hero. Read more about her work as an activist. Research the organisation, Extinction Rebellion Youth, as well.

FRIENDSHIP

KEY QUOTE: 'With Leon's wheels behind mine, I know that whatever happens to the planet, he's got my back.' (p 126)

DISCUSSION POINT: 'Girls can be ... tricky. They're not always there for one another. Be yourself, Bridget. Look for people who make you laugh, who tell you you're great - and actually make you believe it - those are the true friends. They're as rare as diamonds, so if you find one, don't let them go.' (p 161) What qualities do you look

for in a friend?

DISCUSSION POINT: How does Leon demonstrate his friendship to Bee?

ABUSE

KEY QUOTE: ‘Then I see Coach staring across the pool at Laura and Mrs Dark and I know he sees exactly what I do. I hope he has a plan to save Laura. That he knows how to speak up and say the right words to the right people.’ (p 167)

DISCUSSION POINT: Laura’s mother is extremely controlling and cruel to her; attempting to fill her own thwarted sporting dreams with her daughter’s achievements. How common is this sort of behaviour in school sporting arenas? What would you do if you observed adults acting in this way?

DISCUSSION POINT: ‘It’s followed up by a nasty text: **Hey, Fridge Bridget, your new girlfriend is SICK** a vomit emoji and two girls holding hands emoji. I think Sara and Anna wrote it together. Instead of deleting it, I show it to Leon. ‘You should tell someone.’ ‘No way.’ (p 169) This sort of verbal abuse is often tolerated when it shouldn’t be. How would you suggest that Bee should have responded to this?

COMPETITION

KEY QUOTE: ‘I’ve never beaten her before. I probably never will.’ (p 24)

DISCUSSION POINT: Bee discovers that not only can swimming competitions be exhilarating they can also be quite destructive. Laura’s mother’s determination has made Laura quite bitter (hence her nickname ‘The Piranha’). Discuss the pros and cons of competitive sport.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

Study the writing style employed in this narrative, and examine the following sub-topics:

NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

DISCUSSION POINT: Bee tells this story in first person, present tense. How might the story have changed had it been told in alternate voices, for example?

VERSE NOVELS AS A GENRE

DISCUSSION POINT: What does the art of verse novel writing entail? The author, Pip Harry, has this to say about the form:

‘I’d been reading verse novels for children and teens for a few years before trying it myself in *The Little Wave* and now *Are You There, Buddha?* Because verse has no formal structure or set of rules, it gave me a lot of freedom as a writer, and I think that’s what drew me to it initially. I adore verse novel as a form – both as a reader and an author. I love its playfulness, energy, vivid imagery and use of white space. The

way the authors say so much, with so few words. I enjoy how the language captures sound and movement on the page, how vibrant and energetic the narratives are, and how quickly I turn the pages through the story. I love that verse is so rich in metaphor, and that the writing shows us the character's raw emotions and inner thoughts. Verse is a powerful way for young people to discover stories.'

DISCUSSION POINT: Read other verse novels by Steven Herrick, Richard Yaxley, Kwame Alexander, Virginia Euwer Woolf, Sarah Crossan and others and compare to this one. [See **Bibliography.**]

SYMBOLISM

DISCUSSION POINT: There are many references in this novel to the sea, because Bee and Leon spend so much time in the water; her club is also called the Crescent Bay Sharks Swim Club. What other such symbolism did you notice in this novel?

LITERARY DEVICES

ACTIVITY: Find examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below to identify examples.

Simile	'Her comment stings like a jellyfish, the poison spreading quickly.' (p 167)
Metaphors	'I fish for a smile from the murky bottom of this grey sludgy day. Dragging it out, with a rusty hook.' (p 41)
Personification	'The earth is having a tantrum, trying to get us to pay attention.' (p 126)
Other	

DISCUSSION POINT: Listmaking is another featured device in this text. (See for example, pp 46–47) How does listmaking work to tell a story? [See **Writing Tasks** below.]

DISCUSSION POINT: Letter writing (pp 100–101) is a further device used to convey the alternate views of Bee and her mum, as expressed in emails. What did you learn from this exchange?

HUMOUR

ACTIVITY: Identify techniques by which humour is provoked in this novel. Add quotes to the following table:

Sarcasm	
Irony	'She's wearing a t-shirt which says: never trust an atom, they make up everything.' (p 151)
Exaggeration	
Black Humour	
Other	

STRUCTURE

The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention and to shape the work. This novel is unusual in not being divided into chapters. Instead, it is a narrative in verse stanzas, interspersed with some prose dialogue and with text breaks between sections, indicated by a decorative ellipsis.

a) However, each of these sections still contains strong *beginnings and endings* as a way of structuring a narrative, for example:

Beginning: 'I forgot to tell Leon that Claire is also coming to the movie.' (p 193)

Endings: 'Do I?' (p 171) OR

'The next morning, she was gone again, thin enough now to slip through the prison bars, without anyone realising she'd escaped.' (p 181)

Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

b) *Suspense* is the key to any narrative's structure. What aspects of this novel were suspenseful?

SETTING

DISCUSSION POINT: Description in setting can be evoked via sound, taste, hearing and smell as well as via a visual description. Select a section where a number of senses are employed to describe a particular scene.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS: Bridget (Bee) Ballentine; her father; Kath, her stepmother; Max, her four year old stepbrother; Leon McKay, her best friend; Claire, her new friend.

MINOR CHARACTERS: Bee's absent mother; Miss Park, the teacher-librarian; Miss Horden, the PE teacher; Tiana, Sara and Anna, Bee's classmates; Joe Walker, Kale, Jabari, Jabal, the boys the three girls hang out with; Ms Bindu; Laura Dark (The Piranha); Mel, Laura's friend; Mrs Dark; Jane and Henry, Claire's parents; Coach; Georgia, Emily and Rayne, Bee's teammates; Andy and Ollie, Leon's brothers.

ACTIVITY: Draw up a character chart and find key quotes which give a clear picture of any of these characters, and isolate events that demonstrate their natures. Then write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.

QUESTION: Which character was most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about?

WRITING TASKS

ACTIVITY: Read: 'Things I don't tell Dad' (pp 37-39) Then write your own list like this.

ACTIVITY: Bee writes a list: 'Five things I know about Crescent Bay High 1. Where the coldest drink fountain is - outside the gym 2. The best tuckshop specials - spaghetti jaffles, apple turnovers, sushi, Hawaiian pizza 3. Where room 317B is - opposite the science labs 4. The short cut to the music room - over the basketball courts and through the back alley past the art rooms 5. The best place to sit at lunchtime - the library annex, or the carpeted area outside the tuckshop' (p 175) Write your own list of five things you know about your school.

ACTIVITY: Write a letter as if written by Bee telling her mother about her team's success at the state swim champs.

VISUAL LITERACY

ACTIVITY: Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

ACTIVITY: Design a new cover for this book.

ACTIVITY: Create a book trailer for this novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'The one that makes me think of Laura is: 'Our enemies are our greatest teachers.' (p 24)
2. 'Besides, fast fashion is destroying the planet and endangering the lives of workers. I'd rather not add to the problem.' (p 45)
3. 'I know, as a Buddhist, I'm not supposed to want things, but I want to win pretty badly.' (p 64)
4. 'She would have many questions and I have no answers. I don't know what my journey is, how to meditate, or live a meaningful, spiritual life.' (p 76)
5. 'Climate change,' says Claire. 'It'll kill us all.' We fall quiet, thinking of our smouldering future, overpopulation, oceans full of plastic, species dying out, rainforests decimated. Cheerful stuff.' (p 156)
6. 'Buddha says: 'To conquer oneself is a greater task than conquering others.' (p 187)

7. 'My heart aches as I watch him go, knowing I've hurt his feelings. Wishing we were still toddlers having a fight over the best toy. Growing up sucks.' (p 199)
8. 'I hope he's not upset I rejected his boyfriend offer. I push down on a feeling of dread that he may never forgive me, and he'll become just another boy that I pass in the hallways at school.' (p 208)
9. 'Change is never painful, only the resistance to change is painful.' Why have I been resisting change all this time?' (p 267)
10. 'Buddha will always be there for me, if I need her, but, for now, I think she wants me to work things out on my own.' (p 278)

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. **Draw a portrait** of Bee based on the descriptions contained in this novel.
2. **Design a poster** for Claire and Bee to take to the Climate Change march.
3. The **title of this book** refers to Buddhism. What other title might the book have had?
4. **Debate any of the topics** covered in these notes, or suggested by the novel.
5. Locate and study **poetry** which explores the environment. [See: 'Poetry and the Environment' *Poetry Foundation* <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/146462/poetry-and-the-environment>>

CONCLUSION

Bee is approaching puberty and still mourning for her absent mother while trying to negotiate the turbulent waters of teenage life. Her caring dad and kind-hearted stepmother Kath try to help but Bee is often resentful towards them. Her swimming skills are the bright spot in her otherwise challenging school life, but even that is threatened by the extreme competitiveness of her arch-rival Laura Dark (*The Piranha*). Her friends Leon and Claire help her to survive this testing year, and her pleas to the Buddha also provide a way of dealing with her emotional challenges. This is a warm-hearted often very funny novel about discovering who to trust and who you really are.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pip Harry is an Australian author, copywriter and journalist. Her young adult novels include *I'll Tell You Mine*, *Head of the River* and *Because of You*, and have been shortlisted for the CBCA Children's Book of the Year Awards, Victorian Premier's Literary Award and Queensland Literary Awards. Her first middle grade novel, *The Little Wave*, won the 2020 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers. Visit her website for further information: <<https://www.pipharry.com/>>

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Ep 301 Meet middle-grade author Pip Harry, author of 'The Little Wave' *Australian Writers' Centre*
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OTHER NON-FICTION AND WEBSITE TEACHING RESOURCES:

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<<https://creatingmultimodaltexts.com/book-trailers/book-trailers/>>

'Book Trailers - Resources' *Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network*

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Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.