



# **DYING TO TELL ME**

## **by Sherryl Clark**

### **TEACHING NOTES**

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Objectives – Australian Curriculum – English Year 7  
Year 7 Achievement Standard

Receptive modes (listening, reading and viewing)  
Productive modes (speaking, writing and creating)

Source URL - <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Curriculum/F-10#level=7>

Year 7 General Capabilities

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competence

Critical and Creative Thinking

Personal and Social Capability

Ethical Understanding

Source URL - <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/General-capabilities#>

About this novel

Sasha and Nicholas's dad is a policeman who takes up a posting in a one-man police station in a remote town in Victoria. Sasha wanted to stay in the city and thinks Manna Creek is boring, but on her first day there she falls and hits her head. So when their new pet, retired police dog King, starts communicating with her, she puts it down to her concussion.

However, more strange things start to happen. Who is the greasy-haired man she keeps seeing? Why is the local art dealer so nasty? And who killed Mrs Alsopp and set her house on fire?

When Sasha 'sees' Mrs Alsopp's burning house in a dream, it's not enough to save the elderly woman. But the beaten man she sees in the old police cell is already dead – isn't he? Together, Sasha and King must solve the puzzle that underlies what is really going on in Manna Creek, and Sasha must come to terms with her gift.

Focus: Families/Family Relationships/Sibling Relationships/Sibling Responsibilities

Sasha and Nicky support and look out for each other. Dad's new job is a big responsibility and together they have to deal with being the new kids in town as well as the 'cop's kids'.

Sasha is the big sister and she has to make decisions about how much to tell Nicky, what is OK for him to know and what might scare him too much.

Their mother now lives in Queensland and Sasha blames her for leaving them, but she also feels she has never had her mum's full support and love.

Themes:

Parental separation/family breakup  
Trust and maturity in young people  
Behavioural issues  
Youth crime  
Sibling relationships  
Friendship  
Social networks in a small town  
Courage and survival

### Key Understandings and Skills

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competence:

Creation and maintenance of a digital portfolio (file management)  
Book trailer creation  
Other ICT activities to create text response as listed below

Creative and critical thinking

Develop an insight into character motivation  
Creating and presenting texts  
Justifying opinions using evidence  
Make personal connections to the text

Investigate characterisation, plot and setting  
Investigate character traits where character is an animal  
Problem solving – solving the central mystery  
Looking at subplots and how they interact with the main plot

### Personal and social capability

Personal connections – how would you feel if you were in Sasha's situation? How might your feelings change about your pet dog? How would you describe Sasha and King's relationship?

Do you think Sasha looks after Nicky properly?

What do you think the role of a sole policeman in a town would encompass? Investigate the Victoria Police website and see what they say.

Do you think Sasha should have left everything up to her father?

### Ethical understanding

Why does Sasha feel her gift gives her such a responsibility to save people? Would most people feel this way?

When someone is in trouble, how many people put their own lives at risk to save others? What does the word 'hero' mean to you? Is it a real meaning or has the media used it too many times (such as for sports people)?

What does justice mean?

### Suggested Teaching and Learning Activities

#### Digital portfolio

Choose one of the following applications or social media sites to create and collate your digital portfolio: Word, Pages, PowerPoint, and Keynote.

Name and save your portfolio *Dying to Tell Me – Novel Study – Your name/Year*  
Save to your desktop if you have your own computer.

As you progress through the unit of work on *Dying to Tell Me* add all items such as links and URLs of pieces of work you create and use.

#### Before reading

In your digital portfolio, write a few points about what you think *Dying to Tell Me* is about, based on looking at the book's cover (front and back including the blurb).  
Make some predictions about Sasha and her dog, and what kind of story you think this might be.

What is the significance of the derelict old building on the cover?

Each time you add to your portfolio, remember to SAVE.

## About the author

Sherryl Clark is a prolific author as well as a university lecturer. She writes for all ages of readers. Research her background and life. Add your information into your digital portfolio. Don't forget to keep track of the URLs you used. Begin here:

<http://www.sherrylclark.com>

and here:

<http://bookedout.com.au/find-a-speaker/author/sherryl-clark/>

List any other books by Sherryl Clark that you have read.

What awards has the author won?

## Reflections on Dying to Tell Me

### Focus on relationships

Answer the following questions in your digital portfolio:

When Sasha first hears King's voice in her head, she thinks it's from her head injury, and then she thinks she is going crazy.

Would you react in the same way? Why or why not?

Why do you think Sasha accepts her ability to communicate with King? How much does her loneliness influence this? What does King offer her? How does he influence her?

Do you think King is a mentor character? What does this mean? Or is he a friend?

How does Sasha feel about Nicky? What does their age gap mean to her?

Why are relationships with a sibling among the most important relationships we'll ever have?

Why is Sasha so angry with her mother? Is her ability to feel other people's pain important in her relationship with her father? How does this relationship develop and change?

### Courage and survival

Who is Sasha most afraid of – herself or people in the town?

How hard is it for a young person to stand up for themselves, or for what they think is right? How can a young person be a hero today?

What kinds of skills would you need to survive in the bush, especially in extreme weather?

Where does courage come from? Can you learn it? Or do you think being brave means you have to be fearless? Or does it only come when you are in an extreme situation?

Write about a time when you felt brave, or felt afraid, and what you accomplished in spite of your fear.

### Family breakup

Sasha blames her mother for the family breakup because her mother is now living with someone else. What do you think were the factors in Sasha's mother leaving the family? In the story, Sasha says "For the first time, I had a glimmer of understanding of what Mum had meant when she said the waiting and the not-knowing was the worst. It ate away at you until you couldn't stand it anymore." Is this the first time that Sasha begins to understand why her parents' marriage might have failed?

Do you think her mother should have stayed, no matter what?

Why has Sasha stopped drawing and painting? What does her denial of this gift mean?

How does it relate to her other gift of seeing people in danger? Are they the same thing?

## The craft of writing

The author has chosen to use first person point of view. Does this make you feel closer to Sasha as the narrator? How?

How is King's voice different to Sasha's? Why does the author use italics? What kind of character is King (besides being a dog)? How does his having a voice influence this?

The author has said that the original title for this novel was Fire and Ice. You may like to read the Robert Frost poem 'Fire and Ice'.

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173527>

Do you think Fire and Ice would have been a better title? How hard do you find it to create titles for your own work? How do you think authors do this?

How does the setting influence this story? Could it have been set effectively in a city or very large town? Why, or why not?

## Research – how an author works

Even with a book set in the real, contemporary world, the author usually has to do a lot of research to get the background and factual elements right.

In *Dying to Tell Me*, the author has a note at the back about who helped with her research. This included:

A police dog handler and his dog in New Zealand

A visit to the police dog training facility in Melbourne

Interviews with two policemen at sole-person stations in country Victoria

Visits to Victorian country towns in hilly and mountainous areas

Internet research on galleries selling Australian artworks

Why do you think interviewing police dog handlers and watching them train dogs would be more useful than reading books and looking at websites?

What kinds of questions do you think the author asked the policemen in the sole-person stations? How did this feed into the story?

How do you think visiting locations helps an author write a better story?

Manna Creek is an imaginary town – why do you think the author created Manna Creek instead of using a real town?

For an interview with the author about this book, go to:

<http://www.sherrylclark.com/docs/DYING%20TO%20TELL%20ME%20author%20interview.pdf>

## ICT activities

### AudioBoo report

1. Create an account at AudioBoo.fm (or download the app for any platform) and login.
2. Pretend you are a local reporter doing a live cross or a report on the fire at Mrs Alsopp's house, or the art thefts, or the missing police officer (Sasha's father). Listen to reporters on radio or TV doing short news reports for examples.
3. Decide what are the most important details. What language will you use? What is emotive language and what is objective language? How will your voice sound?
4. Using AudioBoo on either your computer or smart phone/tablet, make a recording that is a news report.
5. Add the links to your recordings to your digital portfolio.

### Padlet (formerly Wallwisher)

1. Sign up to Padlet.com or download the app for any platform
2. Create a wall with a series of posts and pictures – these could include photos of what you think Manna Creek and the surrounding area might look like, excerpts from Sasha's diary, her favourite paintings, your favourite artworks, emails Sasha might send to her cousin, etc.

### Making book trailers with Animoto

1. Your teacher will give you a code to login to animoto.com/education. Here you will be able to make a book trailer of up to 5 minutes in length. The idea is to make an advertisement for the book *Dying to Tell Me*, using images, music and text.
2. You may use images from animoto, find some copyright-free photos on the internet ([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)) or take some photos of your own.
3. Select the most appropriate images to represent aspects of the book.
4. Will you add text? What will it add to your book trailer?
5. What type of music will you use? The music available on animoto is copyright free, so you may use what suits your book trailer the best.
6. Check that you are happy with the length of your animoto. Although it can
7. run for up to 5 minutes, it can be shorter. Most book trailers run under a minute.
8. Decide if you are happy with the order of the images and the music. You can edit

9. and/or remix if you need to.
10. Copy the URL and place into your digital portfolio.
11. You may like to ask your teacher about sending the link to the author for her to enjoy!

## Glogster

1. Your teacher will give you a code to login to <http://edu.glogster.com/>
2. Make a glog using images and writing verse about a place you have been that you loved or enjoyed. Use photos and postcards and emails to convey to your audience what this place is like and what it means to you, and what you did there. Look at other Glogster examples to get ideas.
3. Select your images carefully to help illustrate the things most important to you.
4. Take into account the size of you images and text, the amount of text and any links. Design is very important.
5. Copy your URL or take a screenshot and place into your digital portfolio.