

TEACHERS' NOTES

POOL

Justin D'Ath

Introduction

'Jam-packed with sensitivity and realistically handled issues (and a gripping mystery), this is thoroughly absorbing teen literature suitable for both boys and girls.'

Emma, Dymocks Collins Street , Melbourne

Pool is an exciting new novel for young adults set in the fictional town of New Lourdes in country Victoria. Central to the story is the town's public swimming pool, the water of which is no longer level and is reputed to have curative powers. When sixteen year old Wolfgang Mulqueen takes a summer job at the pool, he meets Audrey, nineteen, a blind girl who claims she sees angels. With the discovery of a butterfly unknown to science and an unusual request from Audrey's father, Wolfgang finds himself drawn into an eighteen-year-old mystery, the tragic resolution of which will change his life forever.

Pool is an engaging mix of socio-realism and fantasy set in contemporary Australia. Even the central characters are never sure whether the magical aspects of their world are real or imagined. It can be read as a fantasy, a mystery, a romance or a coming-of-age story, and is open to study and interpretation on a number of levels.

About the Author

One of twelve children, Justin D'Ath grew up on a farm in New Zealand. Most evenings he and his brothers read aloud or told stories to each other. 'We didn't have a TV, so we learned to use our imaginations.'

By the time Justin was eleven, he had completed his first book – a ten-page cartoon about his pet turtle, Bubble – and begun a novel.

His first publication was a monthly cartoon strip in a magazine, which he drew in his tent while he travelled around Australia on a motorbike. Since then, Justin has written a variety of novels and award winning short stories.

Justin's novels have been published in many countries, including Italy, Germany and Denmark.

Pool is his third novel for young adults.

Justin lives near a river in Flowerdale, in the hills north of Melbourne.

Visit his website at: <http://www.justindath.com>

Excerpt from Pool, pages 174-177

Audrey stood there, a motionless figure in the dark.

'What is it?' he asked.

Instead of answering, Audrey scrambled over the wall and set off towards the black line of trees.

'Audrey? Where are you going?' Wolfgang called after her.

She didn't answer. Already she was twenty metres away, moving fast across the grey expanse of lawn. She didn't have her stick! Wolfgang splashed over to the side of the pool and clambered out. He stepped over the wall into the gravel, feeling it sharp beneath his soft bare feet. Ouch! Ouch! Ouch! It was a relief to reach the grass. Already Audrey was halfway to the trees, a pale shape gliding through the darkness. She seemed almost to be running . . . Every few paces she changed direction. Now she was moving directly away from him, now she veered left, now right. Suddenly she swung completely around and for several seconds she came directly towards him, before swerving abruptly to the right. Wolfgang turned too, and hurried after her. She had travelled in a big circle; now she was heading back towards the fountain.

'Look out!' Wolfgang cried too late.

There were a number of bench seats set on concrete pads in the lawn facing the fountain, and it was with one of these that Audrey collided. From ten metres away, Wolfgang heard her grunt of pain . . .

Moments later he was kneeling next to her. 'Audrey, are you okay?'

'Of course I'm not okay!' she snapped. 'It felt like a bus hit me. What did I run into?'

'A seat. I tried to warn you.'

'Help me up.'

Carefully he lifted her into a sitting position.

'Where does it hurt?' he asked.

Audrey pushed the hair back off her face. 'All over. God, I'm such an idiot!'

'What happened?'

'I ran into a freaking garden seat.'

'Before that. Why were you running round like that?'

'Do me a favour, Wolfgang. Don't ask.'

Wolfgang helped her up onto the wooden seat. She thanked him and bent forward with her head in her hands.

'You must think I'm a head-case,' she said.

'I don't.'

'Wolfgang, you didn't see anything, did you?'

'No. It was too dark. Anyway, I was looking the other way.'

'What are you talking about?'

'When you took your shirt off.'

'Not that,' Audrey said impatiently. 'Back there on the lawn. Was anything there?'

'Only you,' he said.

'Me and my imagination.' She let out a long, low sigh. 'Wolfgang, do you believe in God?'

'I guess so.'

'Sometimes I hate Him. I mean, why did He do this to me?'

Wolfgang gazed up at the stars and thought of his own cleft-palate, his father's dementia, Audrey's blindness. 'It was because of the coma, wasn't it?'

She released his hand. 'I stopped breathing for ten minutes. It damaged the part of my brain that affects sight. And they called it a miracle when I woke up.'

'It was a kind of miracle,' Wolfgang said. 'Waking up after two years in a coma.'

'Waking up blind,' Audrey said bitterly.

'At least you woke up.'

'They should never have brought me back.'

'I thought you came out of it on your own,' he said.

'I'm not talking about the coma.'

'What are you talking about?'

'The pool,' she whispered. 'They should have let me drown.'

Wolfgang knew she didn't mean it. She was just feeling sorry for herself. He didn't blame her. Leaning over, he kissed her on the curl of her ear. 'But then I wouldn't have a girlfriend.'

'A loony one,' said Audrey, pushing him gently but firmly away. 'One who sees angels.'

Comprehension Questions

- Is the novel written in the first, second or third person, and in past or present tense?
- Did the first chapter draw you into the book? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What do we learn about Wolfgang in the first chapter? What kind of person is he?
- Why was the town renamed and what is the significance of its new name, New Lourdes?
- By which moniker is Audrey's father, Keith Babacan, also known?
- What kind of tree does Audrey lie under at the pool?
- What word does Audrey accuse Wolfgang of saying 'a lot'?
- Which animal does Audrey want to smell at the zoo? What was Wolfgang's reason for taking her there?
- Who was Marceline Flavel and where did she come from?
- How old are Wolfgang's parents?
- What event happened the day Wolfgang was born?
- Why does Audrey compare herself to owls and possums?
- What colour is the pool master key?
- Does the book fit into more than one genre? Identify the genre/s.

- By which nickname does Michael refer to Wolfgang? Identify two reasons why he is called this name by his peers.
- To which country does Wolfgang's father, Leo, suggest a butterfly collecting trip?
- Which university course does Wolfgang pretend to be a student of? Why did he choose this particular course?

Writing

- Write a one page summary of the book
- Write a 400 word review of Pool, suitable for publication in a newspaper or magazine. State the premise of the story, genre and the target audience. Evaluate the plot, characterisation and the themes and issues it explores. Give reasons as to whether or not you would recommend this book to other readers. Finally, give it a rating out of 10.
- Audrey believes she was once another person in the world beyond the pool. Using the descriptions of the 'dream place' from the book, write a short composition describing this world and the person that Audrey might have been within it. What would the world look like? Considering what Keith says about Audrey's behaviour when she woke from her coma, what kind of person might she have been?
- The novel is set in a realistic world in which elements of fantasy or magical realism, such as the slanting pool, occur. Write a short story set in our world and time in which fantastical elements intrude. Consider how your characters might respond to these elements and the complications that may arise.

Vocabulary

- Use each of the following words in a sentence to illustrate its meaning

Mystique (9) Buoyant (11) Forceps (44) Aberration (77)

Translucent (106) Comatose (112) Incongruous (118) Interloper (130)

Nocturnal (149) Monosyllabic (178) Oxymoron (251) Cyanide (296)

- Using synonyms, similes and metaphors of your own devising, rewrite the sections of **bold** text in the following sentences.

Wolfgang watched **greedy-eyed** as [the butterfly] circled one of the **brightly flowering** buddleias, its wings **semaphoring their brightdarkbrightdark invitation** down the length of the pool.

His **wispy** hair stood out from his head **like spider webs** and his mouth was a **gummy black hole** in the sunken lower part of his face.

'Help her!' she shrieked, **fluttering her pale hands** in front of her **like two frantic butterflies**.

Characters and Relationships

- Which character do you like best? Explain your answer.
- Wolfgang feels it isn't fair to have children when you were old enough to be grandparents. Is this reasonable? How do you feel about Wolfgang's attitude to and relationship with his parents? How do you think you would feel in his place?
- The day after Audrey's birthday party Wolfgang tells Audrey he loves her. What is her reaction? Why do you think Wolfgang falls in love with Audrey?

- Does Wolfgang change or grow as a character over the course of the book? If so, how has he developed?

Discussion and Oral Activity

- Throughout the book Wolfgang finds himself trapped in and adding to his ever increasing 'Lie File'. As a class, discuss the ethics of Wolfgang's lies. Why does he tell these lies? Does it affect the way you feel about his character? Are there circumstances when it's okay to lie? If so, what are they?
- Using the structure of a formal debate, argue the premise: 'The world beyond the pool was a symptom of Audrey's mental illness and led to her death by suicide'.
- Write and perform a short monologue set at the conclusion of the book in the voice of one of the characters. Consider the voice, attitudes and behaviour of the character you have chosen.

Interpretation

- Identify the major themes or issues of the book. Do you think the author was trying to teach us anything? If so, did he succeed?
- What are the 'angels' that Audrey sees in the botanical gardens? How does she see them when she is otherwise blind? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.
- The 'dream place' and Audrey's fate may be interpreted in several ways. Was the dream place a delusion, a heaven or another world? Did Audrey die or did she simply shed her body to return home? How do you interpret these aspects of the story? Explain how you came to these conclusions.