

THE PAIN, MY MOTHER, SIR TIFFY, CYBER BOY & ME

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ISBN: 9781742991504

RRP: \$16.99

This is the story of Maggie Butt ('impending doom' is her default setting). Maggie lives with her mother. Her father is celebrity actor Jason Davenport, and he left when Maggie was eleven. Enter the Pain, exactly nine weeks and one day before her Year Ten Graduation Dance, to make life extra complicated – he even burdens Maggie with Sir Tiffy (a cat who has seen better days). And who's Cyber Boy, he might just be the geek who makes Maggie start to see things a little differently.

This is the story of how Maggie comes to look beyond life's annoying peccadilloes to appreciate the big picture.

STUDY NOTES

- Re-read the first chapter. What is the tone of the novel? How is this established? How does the author engage the reader?
- Discuss: It often feels like we are in Maggie's head, or that she is speaking to us. What are the techniques the author uses to create an intimate connection between the protagonist and the reader (eg direct address, ironic quotation marks, emphases (italics and capitals), asides in brackets).
- What impression did you have of Meg as you started reading the novel? Why was this so? How does Meg's character develop by the end of the novel?
- Why do you think Maggie really has an issue with the Pain (aka Danny)? Why do you think her

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opinion of him shifts?

- Use the oft-appropriated line 'There once was ...' to start your own story. It can be about yourself or an invented character.
- 'A happy ending? Well, like any story I think, that depends on when you choose to stop telling it, my dear.' (p 239) Discuss the elements that make up a story: beginnings, diversions/digressions, stories within stories, denouements etc. How do students think the story will continue beyond where Maggie chooses to stop telling it?
- Intertextuality is the use of another text to shape a text's meaning. Can you locate intertextual references in the novel? How does each shape meaning relevant to the scene and/or the overall narrative? Consider creating a class collage and/or map to illustrate the cultural references.
- Find an example of another text (eg book, film, television show, artwork) that uses intertextuality? Compose a reflection that explains how your chosen text uses intertextuality (eg allusion, parody etc) and why. Consider using hyperlinks, illustrations and videos in your reflection.
- Hyperbole is the use of extreme exaggeration to illustrate a point. Find instances of hyperbole in the novel? Do you think they are an effective device?
- When Maggie describes the hypothetical J-Mag, who is she really describing? Which other celebrity couples are you aware of? How are they presented in the media? How much of what you see do you think is truth, and how much fiction?
- When Maggie discusses Bert's photos of cats (p 157) she illustrates how slippery language can be and that a sentence can have more than one meaning. Take the opportunity to discuss the significance of context and grammar in maintaining clarity of meaning. Can students think of examples of slippery language they've come across and/or invent some of their own humorous examples (eg Lynne Truss's Eats, Shoots and Leaves).
- '*I made a Momentous and Potentially Life-altering Decision (MAPLAD)!*' (p 158). What acronyms do



students commonly use? Why do they think they're so popular? What are the advantages and disadvantages of their use?

- 'Maggie Butt is the undisputed champion of being "almost there".' (p 168) Discuss this scene. How is Maggie feeling? How does Sista Lista respond? Does her response help Maggie?
- How does Maggie's interest in film, television and drama influence her character and her story? Support your answer with examples from the novel.
- What kind of story do you think **The Pain, My Mother, Sir Tiffy, Cyber Boy & Me** is (eg comedy, drama, romance)? Provide evidence to support your answer.

