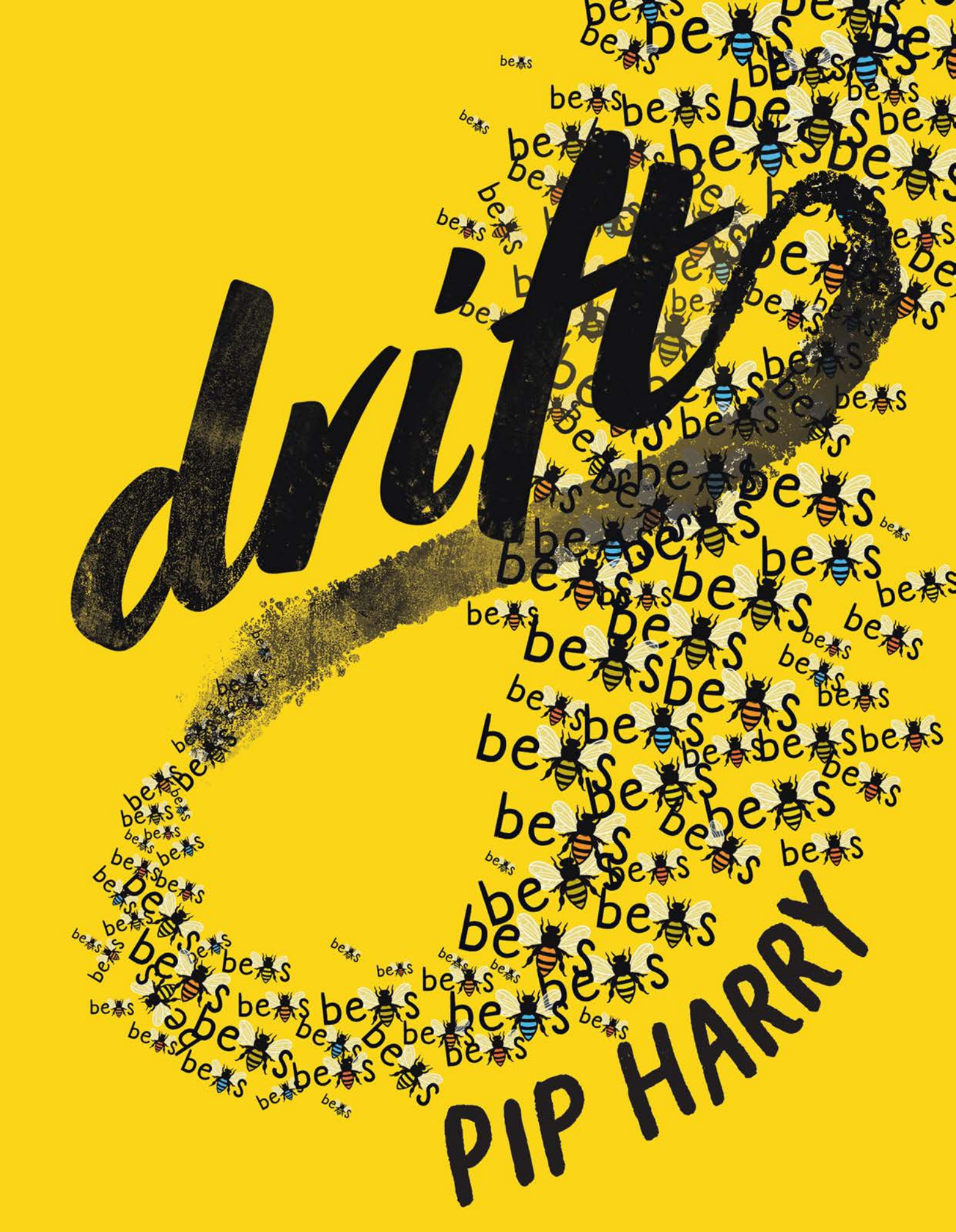

TEACHERS RESOURCES

Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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LOTHIAN Children's Books

INTRODUCTION

Drift is a beautifully written verse novel that will resonate with younger teen readers who are beginning to understand themselves and the changing world they live in.

Fourteen-year-old **Nate** has just moved back to Australia and is finding it hard to navigate a new city, school and changed home life. His next-door neighbour, **Luna**, is dealing with her own issues: a viral video, friends who have dropped her, and a subsequent anxiety disorder.

When a swarm of 20,000 bees unexpectedly settle in the walls of Nate's family's house, Nate and Luna come together to save the hive, befriending local beekeeper Tyler. Over the course of one summer, their loyalties will be tested and their lives will be forever changed.

A topical, hopeful and authentic coming-of-age story that will captivate young teen readers, from multi-award-winning children's author Pip Harry.

BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the cover of the novel, designed by Astred Hicks. 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 (Humanities & Social Sciences (HASS), Science, and English Language & Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CYBER BULLYING

Discussion Point: Luna has struggled to recover from being physically attacked at a party by two jealous girls in retaliation for her flirting with a boy named Jonah. But even worse than that is the fact that the fight was filmed and posted to social media. Luna's world has been severely damaged by this and she has lost confidence in herself, developed an anxiety disorder, and has sought solace in solitude. How does she eventually recover from this trauma?

Discussion Point: Luna's dad is 'old school' and doesn't understand her need for counselling.
'Why are kids so bloody anxious these days, Steph?
I don't remember anyone seeing a shrink
when I was a teenager.
If you didn't go to school,
nobody cared.
You got a trade,
started working for a living. None of this softly, softly bullshit.

Life is hard,
our kids need to get tougher.
Am I wrong?
In my book, if she's skipping school, she can get a job.' (p 230)
Debate her dad's views as opposed to the advice Luna receives from Molly, her psychologist.

Discussion Point: Apart from the trauma Luna has suffered by the video being posted, when she discovers that it was her best friend Sia who posted it she is horrified. And when she discusses this cyber bullying with her mother, she writes:
'But I didn't know
what Sia did
is illegal.' (p 275)
Discuss the legality of cyber bullying with your students.

Discussion Point 'Yes, but perhaps Sia's original goal was to shame the offenders, and not you? She might not have understood her actions when she forwarded the footage on to someone else. With access to phones and social media it's so quick and easy to send or post something without really thinking about the consequences.'
(p 277) Discuss this statement.

Discussion Point: Teachers might prepare for this unit by reading non-fiction and website information about cyber bullying. They might also invite students to read fiction depicting cyber bullying and to discuss and compare to this novel. [See **Bibliography**.]

MOVING TO A NEW PLACE

Discussion Point: Nate has left Singapore with his mother Amber and struggles adjusting to his new environment in Australia in a laidback beachside suburb. What are the things he misses about Singapore?

Discussion Point: Part of adjusting to a new place is physical – living in a different home, getting to know your way around – and part of it is adjusting to new routines at school and making new friends. What are the things (or who are the people) who help Nate to make this adjustment?

COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE

Discussion Point: Nate and Luna both mature in the course of the novel. In what ways do they change?

Discussion Point: Do any other characters in this novel mature as well?

ILLNESS AND FAMILY DISTRESS

Discussion Point: 'Amber can't cope with a pet
until after she has back surgery to fix her
spondylolisthesis – an extremely long word
for a slipped vertebra.' (p 18)
Amber's illness is another thread in the novel's themes. Nate's struggles to fit in at a new school are exacerbated by his worries about his mother and by her inability to fully participate in establishing their new life. How does illness shape this narrative?

Discussion Point: Nate is left with the responsibility of caring for his mother and this leads to doubts about their relationship:

‘Questions I want to ask Amber:
Where is Dad?
When is he coming back to Australia?
Is there something else going on?
Why did we come here without him?’ (p 22)
Discuss how illness can lead to family distress and misunderstandings.

SCIENCE

https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/science/

BEES IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Note: Pip Harry’s 1959-built home on Sydney Northern beaches is set in thick bushland and has been swarmed by tens of thousands of native bush bees and European honeybees, over many years, due to the scent of old hives in the walls. A skilled local beekeeper came to the rescue during multiple swarms during 2021, teaching Pip and her family how to keep productive and happy bees, and why they’re vital to our ecosystems. With help from this beekeeper, they managed to catch swarms and save hives and were introduced to the wonderful world of beekeeping. This personal experience inspired the theme of bees and beekeeping in *Drift*.

Discussion Point: Encourage students to research beekeeping and to discuss what they discover about this practice.

Discussion Point: Bees play a very important role in the environment:
‘My generation –
the one suing governments for
environmental Duty of Care –
know enough about bees
to understand the world
can’t survive without them.

Without bees
pollinating plants and crops,
supermarkets would be half-empty,
global food supplies would dry up.

Some people say if there
were no more bees on the planet,
humans would have four years left to live.’ (pp 7–8)
Research the role bees play in the environment by reading further about this topic.

Discussion Point: The biosecurity risk of the varroa mite has been in the news recently and in this novel Tyler explains to Nate and Amber that moving the bees now is fraught by the risk of contamination. (pp 111+). Research this disease and how beekeepers are dealing with it.

Discussion Point: Tyler explains some basic bee regulations (p 237) to Nate. Students may find this another topic to explore more fully.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>

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

VERSE NOVELS AS A GENRE

Discussion Point: The verse novel is a unique art form telling an extended narrative in a series of connected poems. The form often employs first-person narrative and it also often employs multiple narrators. The writing is generally very personal and immediate. Such novels often trace a rite of passage for a teenage protagonist as well. This novel is told from two points of view in first person: Nate and Luna.

A verse novel also often canvasses a social issue or issues in the context of a character's personal journey. Several themes are also canvassed in the novel (see above). Discuss the work in terms of the tropes of this genre. Read primary and secondary sources as a background to this activity. [See **Bibliograph**y.]

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE

Discussion Point: Drift is a beekeeping term meaning: 'The failure of bees to return to their own hive in an apiary containing many colonies, because they have entered neighbouring colonies instead.' 'Glossary of Beekeeping Terms' *Better Bee* https://www.betterbee.com/glossary/ Discuss this definition in relation to Nate's and Luna's stories in this novel.

POETRY TECHNIQUES

Activity: The novel employs a few examples of 'concrete poetry': where the poem is printed in a shape or format that echoes the meaning, for example,

'Tyler
climbs
down
the
ladder' (p 16): the words are arranged as steps on a ladder.

'She puts it on a shelf,
U
P

H
I
G
H
As if that will stop me.' (p 37): the words 'up high' are arranged vertically on the page.

'The trip wasn't accidental,
they wanted her to
f
a
l
l.'
(p 92): the word 'fall' is printed as a series of four letters falling.

‘cuts a
sharp
diagonal
line
across
the
grass’
(p 133): the text is printed as a diagonal line.

‘Her
long
slim
abdomen
giving
her
royal
highness
away.’
(p 174): the text is shaped like a bee. Invite students to write a poem and arrange it on the page in this way.

Discussion Point: Read the following verse:
‘We are
a daisy chain
linked across
the water;
a pair of water lilies, floating.
Water closes around my ears,
everything is silent, still,
perfect.’
(p 163) Discuss this lyrical piece of writing describing a moment of feeling, and the emotions it conveys.

Discussion Point: Three times in the novel a page features a word or a line repeated over and over: **1.** ‘Bees.’ (p 4) **2.** ‘Oh no. What have I done?’ (p 201) **3.** ‘Sia took the video.’ (p 273) Why does the writer repeat words in these pages? What effect does it have for the reader?

Activity: Repetition is used in this quote to great effect:
‘I wish I was behind thick glass.
I wish I was back in Singapore (my real home).
I wish I didn’t have to leave.’ (p 5)
Invite students to write a short poem using repetition in this way.

Discussion Point: Discuss spacing in these poems. The line breaks are very important in creating both rhythm and in enhancing meaning via emphasis.

Discussion Point: List-making is another strategy employed in this poetry:
‘Brown water around my waist now,
my toes sink into the muck.

Snakes
Eels

Fish
Water dragons
Yabbies …
with sharp pincers.' (p 160)
Invite students to describe their feelings about a place using a list in this way.

NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

Activity: Nate and Luna's voices are each in first person, present tense which lends a very immediate insight into their two perspectives on the action in this verse novel. Write a poem as if written by Nate's mother, Amber, about any incident described by Nate.

SYMBOLISM

Discussion Point: Bees are an obvious symbol in this book. (See notes about the significance of the title above.) What other 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	'when my insides feel like water boiling in a kettle.' (p 278)
Metaphors	'It's a disaster. A money pit. A train wreck.' (p 11)
Personification	
Other	

HUMOUR

Activity: Identify techniques by which humour is evoked. Add quotes to the following table:

Sarcasm	
Irony	
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:

a) The poems *alternate between Nate and Luna*. This alternative narration creates narrative tension and enticingly encourages the reader to read on.

b) *Suspense* is created to drive this narrative's structure. Will Nate settle in? Will Luna recover? Will Amber's surgery go well? When will Nate's dad join them? What other questions drive this narrative?

SETTING

Discussion Point: Description in setting can be evoked via a complex range of literary devices, including contrast, for example:
'Amber pans her camera
across the vast dam.
Ducks and black swans bobbing.
A lone kayaker slicing through the water.
It's so quiet here,

I crave traffic,
sirens,
horns beeping.

Sometimes the silence feels so deep
I could fall into it
and drown.' (pp 38–9)

‘In my room,
I click on a ‘Katong Walking Tour’ video
and I’m back in Singapore again,
walking the hot streets
around my condo,
past construction sites,
my old school,
durian fruit stores,
coffee shops,
noodle stalls,
the kaya waffle bakery that sold
slices of Indonesian thousand-layer cake, *lapis legit*.’ (p 56)

Discuss the devices used in these two quotes.

CHARACTERS

Major Characters: Nate; his mother Amber; his dad (in Singapore); Luna Bishop; Luna’s brother Wilde; Luna’s mother and father; Tyler, the beekeeper; Molly, Luna’s psychologist.

Minor Characters: Siti their former Helper now back in Java; Sia, Luna’s former best friend; Sia’s mother, Steph; Camila, Tyler’s girlfriend; Jonah, the boy Luna formerly liked; Dougall Kelly and Diya Kadal, Nate’s group assignment buddies; Fiona and Marieke, the attackers; Barry, one of the Frosty Frogs.

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: Nate describes himself here:
‘Everyone jumbled up like
mixed lollies.

If I was a lolly,
I’d be a strawberry cream.

Soft,
bland,
not much flavour.
Totally forgettable.’ (p 240)

Invite students to choose a lolly and why it describes them.

Activity: Write a poem as if written by Luna about her feelings for her brother, Wilde.

Activity: Write a diary entry by Tyler about meeting Nate and Amber, and their kindness to him and Cami.

VISUAL LITERACY

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>

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

Activity: The cover, designed by Astred Hicks, depicts a 'bee swarm of words'. This is an evocative statement about the novel's themes, and its poetic style. Design a new cover for this book.

Activity: Astred Hicks designed a cover for another book by Pip Harry, a YA title: *Because of You*. Compare the illustration styles used across these two covers.

Activity: Design a poster advising people to protect bees and why they are important to the environment. Create a slogan as the focus for the poster.

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

FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'I think about our life there,
how different it was
to how people expect.

'It wasn't, you know, glitzy and expat glamorous,' I say.
When we went over, Dad was on a local package
with his company – he's a hydrologist, they were
setting up a water plant. We lived in a low-key
apartment complex with lots of local families. I
didn't go to the fanciest school or drive around in a
Tesla. We used the buses and MRT, ate at hawker
centres.'
'So, not like *Crazy Rich Asians*?' says Cami.' (p 53)

2. 'Girls run 4 kilometres.
Boys run 6 kilometres.

That's sexist.

I can run 6 kilometres,
10 kilometres,
20 kilometres,
faster than most boys.

I've been beating boys in races
since I was a little kid.' (p 61)

3. 'The main thing, Luna, is to keep talking and not keep your feelings about what's happened to you bottled up inside.' (p 130)

4. 'You're looking for a place to live?' Amber asks Tyler.

'Yeah, but we keep missing out – there are so many
other people looking, and most of them have steady
jobs. They can afford to pay a bigger deposit. We have

no chance. I think we've seen over thirty places now …' (p 192)

5. 'People sometimes film terrible things – the scene of a car accident, a fire, an assault – rather than assisting for a lot of different reasons – they might be trying to shame the attackers into stopping or perhaps they're too scared to jump in because it's dangerous, or they don't know what to do.' (p 277)

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. **Compare this novel to other middle grade or young adult verse novels. [**See **Bibliography**.]
2. **Design a poster to advertise this book.**
3. The **title of this book** is explained above. 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** on the theme of bees. [See **Bibliography**.]

CONCLUSION

Drift is a moving story about the uncertainties attached to coming of age. It is a celebration of friendship, family and romance. It deals with cyber bullying, moving countries, care for the environment and family dynamics in a cohesive narrative that resolves in a stunningly lyrical resolution:

'She stands on her tiptoes,
our helmets crashing …

. . . the sun, moon, stars
colliding.' (p 309)

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.* Her middle grade novel *The Little Wave* won the 2020 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers. Pip's second middle grade novel, *Are You There, Buddha?*, was a 2022 Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book and was shortlisted for the 2022 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature. Pip's next middle grade novel, *August & Jones*, was published by Hachette in 2022 and was shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year: Younger Readers 2023 and the 2024 YABBA Awards, and won the CBCA Shadow Judging Book of the Year for Younger Readers. Pip is also the author of two picture books: *Over or Under?* and *The Inside Dog*. See also: www.pipharry.com.

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