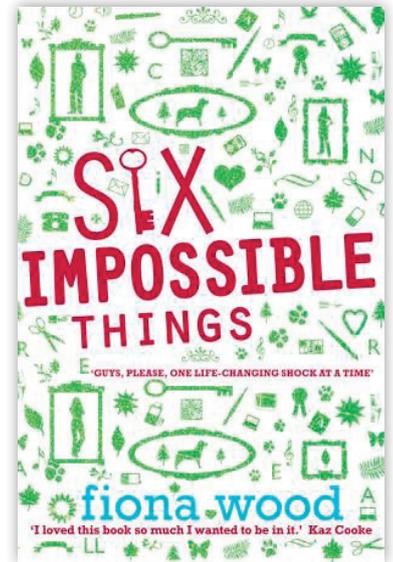




PAN MACMILLAN AUSTRALIA  
TEACHERS NOTES

# SIX IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

## FIONA WOOD



### Introduction

Fiona Wood is a well-known writer of television shows including *The Secret Life of Us*, *Silver Sun* and *Neighbours*. *Six Impossible Things* is her first young adult novel. Fiona lives in Melbourne with her husband, university student children and bad old dog.

*Six Impossible Things* is the story of fourteen-year-old nerd-boy Dan Cereill. Dan's life changes dramatically when he has to deal with the fallout of the announcements that his father is gay and that the family is broke. For a start he has to move house and change schools. But now he can reinvent himself. Or so he thinks. He falls for his new neighbour Estelle and becomes friends with the mysterious tenant in the stables building who teaches him about 'cool'. *Six Impossible Things* weaves its narrative through the themes of friendship, love, loss, honesty and reinvention.

### Curriculum Links

English: Reading, Writing, Research, Presenting, Talking, Listening  
PDHPE: Interpersonal relationships, Decision Making, Problem Solving  
Creative and Performing Arts: Drama  
Science and Technology: Using Technology

### Learning Outcomes

Students will have the opportunity to:

- respond to themes and issues in a text
- draw on a range of skills and strategies to read and comprehend a text
- examine the characteristics of true friendships
- discuss responsibilities and tough decisions about honesty
- examine the components of attraction and first love
- define and devise solutions to common teenage social issues
- devise solutions to bullying
- examine the role of pets and the part they play in people's lives
- devise, act and rehearse drama for performance to an audience
- write in different text types and genres
- use technology to research and present information

## Before You Read

Write your own list of six things you think may be impossible in your own life. Keep the list and examine it in a year's time. Read the back cover of the book. Discuss with a classmate other stories of a similar genre you may have read and enjoyed.

## Read The Book

Read *Six Impossible Things* stopping every now and then to re-evaluate where you think the story may be heading. Discuss your ideas with other students and compare parts of the story you like and why.

## After You Read

Use the following questions and ideas to promote discussion of the book. Write your answers and ideas or discuss the themes and issues in small groups.

1. Dan has to cope with four big bombshells dropped by his father at the start of the story. What are the four bombshells and how does Dan deal with each (page 4)? How do you think you would cope with these revelations?
2. Many times in the story the characters keep their true feelings a secret. Why do people put on happy faces even when things are not going well? Are there times when honesty is not the best policy?
3. What strategies could you put in place to help make a new start in a different neighbourhood and school where you don't know anybody?
4. A key plot thread in the novel is Dan reading Estelle's diary. This brings up the issues of honesty and deception. How did Dan justify reading the diary? Do you think it is ever right to read someone's diary? How would you react if someone read your secrets?
5. Dan's mum tries to start a wedding cake business. Why doesn't her business do very well? Do you think she did the right thing by talking people out of going through with their weddings?
6. Dan's initial feelings towards Oliver were irritation and suspicion. How does Dan's relationship with Oliver evolve? What does Dan learn from him?
7. Dan was angry and confused and so he didn't want to speak to his dad for a long time. How do you think Dan would have felt speaking to his dad again for the first time? (page 125) Why is it so hard to forgive others and move on?
8. Estelle and Janie hatch a secret plot to get Janie to Sydney for the short film competition. What did you think of their plan? Do you think Janie would have been allowed to go if she had asked? Use the quote from Sir Walter Scott, 'Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive' to discuss honesty versus dishonesty in your life. Extend the discussion to politics and life in general.
9. What are some of the things that bond Dan and Estelle? Is it just looks and outward appearance that draws people to each other?
10. Jayzo and Dan eventually break through and have a slightly better relationship. Do you think they would have had a real conversation if they hadn't had the punch-up (page 238)? How did the fight change their relationship and why? Is standing up to a bully the right thing to do? What other ways are there of dealing with bullying?

## Activities

### Six Secret Things

On page 24 Dan makes a list of parts of his life he doesn't want people to know. Read the list and then keep your own journal where you write six things about various topics. Begin with six things you don't want people to know about you. Make sure you hide your journal in a safe place.

### Beat the Bully

Dan experiences different types of bullying on his first day at school. (page 25). Work with a partner and list different types of bullying experienced at school.

Next to your list write some strategies to deal with each type of bullying, giving examples.

### Who Am I?

Oliver says to Dan: 'The coolest thing is just to be authentically yourself.' (page 93) Why is this an important goal, and why is it sometimes so hard to achieve?

### First Love

Dan falls for Estelle the first time he sees her (page 12) Dan says Estelle 'walks in beauty – yes like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies' (page 1). Use the internet or a book to find Lord Byron's poem *She Walks in Beauty*.

The theme of the poem is the woman's internal and external beauty. How does this relate to Dan's feeling for Estelle? What are the important things in a relationship? Did you imagine Dan would win over Estelle in the way he did?

### Narrative Style

*Six Impossible Things* has many narrative complications and resolutions that make it compelling. List some of the complications and resolutions in the book. How do they work in the story? Choose one complication and write your own resolution. How would this change the story and the development of the characters?

### The Secret Life

While agonizing about whether to confess to Estelle about reading her diary, Dan thinks: 'What she doesn't know can't hurt her' (page 232). Discuss this thought in the context of the story. Is the statement a good justification for Dan? Is it ever OK to keep things from people we love? List some things in your life which you may be keeping from your family or friends. Debate the morality of keeping things to yourself to stop someone being hurt.

### Happy Endings

Despite all the complications in *Six Impossible Things* and all that Dan experiences, the final resolution is a happy one. Do real life situations always have happy endings? How would you have felt if Estelle hadn't forgiven Dan?

### Comforting Companions

Pets can be a great comfort to people of all ages when they are lonely and sad. Discuss the role that Howard the dog plays in the story. Include the feelings and emotions he stirs in Dan. How would Dan have coped without Howard as a sounding-board? If you have a pet describe the importance your pet has in your life.

### Think About It

Think about the phrase 'It's not what you have it's what you do that counts.' (page 216)

Write an exposition about the topic including whether you agree or disagree with the statement and why. Include arguments for and against the topic and give relevant examples.

### Fantastic Fairytales

*Six Impossible Things* contains a number of elements and references to the Cinderella fairytale. The main character's name—Dan Cereill—is an anagram of Cinderella. Find the other similarities to Cinderella hidden in *Six Impossible Things*. Share and compare your findings with the class.

## Activities

### The Power of Letter Writing

For a long time Dan was so hurt and angry that he couldn't bring himself to open the birthday present from his father. When Dan finally did, he found a powerful letter from his dad. Think of someone you have hurt or have been hurt by. Write them a letter. Be as honest as you would be if you had no intention of actually sending the letter.

### Social Issues

The novel discusses teenage social issues including peer group pressure, popularity, underage drinking, trying to be yourself and lying to your parents. Work in small groups. Select one of these issues that has relevance or interest to your group. Choose a creative way such as a short drama, a piece of art or a poster, to explore the issue. Define your issue then provide suggestions for solutions. Present your ideas to the class.

### Fun Phobias

Lou and Dan become friends when they realise they have similar personalities. They discuss different phobias and their technical terms such as triskaidekaphobia and luposlipaphobia (page 63). Use books and the internet to find the names of other phobias.

### Lights, Camera, Action

Work in groups of 2–4 students. Choose a section of *Six Impossible Things* to act out for the class. Write the text as a script including dialogue and stage directions then rehearse and perform your piece. Bring in props and costumes to enhance your performance.

## Book Review

Write a short book review for *Six Impossible Things*. Include the following:

- Title
- Author
- Illustrator
- Favourite character/s and why
- Plot summary
- Themes and issues in the book
- Favourite part of the story
- A comment about how the story ends
- Recommendation (who you would recommend the book to and why)
- An illustration