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The Thunderbolt Pony

By Stacy Gregg

Book Summary:

A dramatic and emotional story about one girl's determination to stand by her beloved animals - and her refusal to give up even in the face of impossible odds.

Twelve-year-old Evie has a lot to deal with in her life. First came her Dad's cancer, and then the OCD that dominates her life. Now a devastating earthquake has shaken her world apart. Her mother is badly injured and is evacuated by helicopter from the small South Island town of Parnassus. Evie should be joining her neighbours for the rough backroad drive to Kaikoura where they will be picked up by a navy ship, but when she realises she will be forced to abandon her beloved pony Gus she is determined to find another way. In the chaos of the evacuation, Evie sets off over land with Gus, her cat Moxey and her dog Jock on a seemingly impossible journey to reach the rescue ship. But, the damage to the land is extensive, the earthquakes aren't over, the aftershocks keep coming and time is running out.

Key Learning Outcomes

English: ACELA1493 ACELA1498 ACELA1779 ACELT1603
ACELT1603 ACELY1692 ACELY1694

Science: ACSSU075 ACSHE061

Geography: ACHASSK088

Civics and Citizenship: ACHASS091

Themes

Resilience, How society and individuals cope with natural disasters, Mental Illness

Recommended Ages: 9+

Before reading

New Zealand

Where is New Zealand? Can you locate it on a world map?

Where is Parnassus? Is it in New Zealand? Where else is it?

Earthquakes

As a class, construct a KWL chart about earthquakes (What do we KNOW, what do we WANT to know, what have we LEARNED). Brainstorm all the facts you know. Don't worry if they are correct or not, write them down. When you research you will be able to confirm and adjust what you thought you knew. Then write down all the questions you'd like to know. Divide the questions up amongst everyone in the class. Research answers to your questions and then present your findings to the class. Add your answers to your KWL.

Videos:

National Geographic: Earthquakes 101

<http://video.nationalgeographic.com.au/video/101-videos/earthquake-101>

BBC News: How Earthquakes Happen

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/4126809.stm

ABC Behind The News: Christchurch Earthquake

<http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3148193.htm>

ABC Catalyst: Christchurch Earthquake

<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/3510004.htm>

ABC Catalyst: Earthquakes, Will scientists ever be able to accurately predict earthquakes?

<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/2836752.htm>

ABC Behind The News: Japan Kids (Life after the earthquake)

<http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3166732.htm>

Websites:

National Geographic Kids: Structure of the Earth

<https://www.natgeokids.com/au/discover/geography/physical-geography/structure-of-the-earth/>

Children's BBC: Earthquakes

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/find_out/guides/tech/earthquakes/newsid_1894000/1894934.stm

Q& A with Geoscience Australia's Seismologist Dr Trevor Allen

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-02-23/earthquake-qa/1955072>

ABC Science: What causes the ground to liquefy after an earthquake?

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2011/02/23/3146490.htm>

Themes

Resilience and Success

Evie faces tremendous challenges, yet she rises to meet each and every one of them. Even adults would struggle to overcome what Evie had to overcome! Write a list of every challenge she faced, from losing her house in the earthquake to the obstacles faced in her journey to the coast.

It is difficult to know how we would respond if we were faced with the same challenges. However, research shows that there are some common characteristics amongst people who succeed. Watch the following TED talks and discuss.

Carol Dweck – The power of believing that you can improve

https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve

Angela Lee Duckworth – Grit: The power of passion and perseverance

https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance#t-131737

Greek Mythology

Create a KWL chart for Greek Mythology. Research the main Greek Gods. Take note when they are mentioned in the book. What other references to Greek Mythology are mentioned in the book? Why do you think references have been made to Greek Mythology in the book? What purpose does it serve?

Further activity & discussion suggestions

As you read the book;

- Take note of all the different towns Evie passes through. Mark them on a map of New Zealand so you can plot her course.
- Keep a list of new or unfamiliar words. What letter patterns, common prefixes and suffixes, spelling generalisations, morphemic word families and word origins do you recognise that could help you remember how to spell the word? Write definitions for each of the words. Challenge: Use each word in a sentence.
- The book explores two timelines simultaneously. Draw a timeline of events for each.
- There are many examples where long descriptive sentences have been juxtaposed with short sentences. Find examples of this as you read the book. What is the effect of this technique? Can you incorporate it into your own writing?

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Chapter Study

Chapter One

Who is Zeus?

Why Zeus turns into her psychologist Willard Fox? Why does she fall through the clouds? (The answer to both these questions is the same...)

What happened to Evie's mum?

Who is Gus, Moxy and Jock?

Chapter Two

Looking back, I can't tell you why, but from that moment on the way home from the hospital when I double-shut that car door, that was when it began.

What began? Why do you think 'it' began at this point?

Chapter Three

In this chapter, Evie faces off against a bull. Evie waves her shirt to attract the bulls attention. Why does she do that? Have you heard of a matador? What are they?

What should you do if a bull charges at you?

Chapter Four

Zeus Willard and Evie discuss fate, and blaming things that go wrong in our life on fate. What is fate? Do you believe in fate? Why/Why not?

Chapter Five

It is only after we have cooled down and I have led Gus back to the float that I realise his two braids have unravelled. They are completely gone. They must have come undone on the course. And the realisation that me and Gus, we did it all on our own makes me so proud. But it worries me too, because, I have no idea how long our protection was gone. Hastily, I put the braids back in again and I just hope that I am not too late.

Evie braids Gus' mane to keep herself calm. When Evie braids Gus' mane it is a compulsion. You will learn more about that if you complete the 'After You Read the Book' activities on OCD.

At times, we will all be faced with situations that make us anxious and we can develop a tool kit of strategies to help us. What strategies do you have to keep calm and stop you feeling anxious? Write a class list of all your different coping strategies.

Chapter Six

Will I be able to see all the way to Hades?

What is Hades?

Evie's mum was injured in the earthquake. This meant that Evie had to set out at night, in the dark, to her friend's farm so that she could get help. What words would you use to describe Evie? (e.g. brave, courageous) Do you think you could be as brave as Evie?

Chapter Seven

In this chapter Evie crosses a flooded river because she has no other option. Is it safe to cross a flooded river? Why/why not? Use the following websites to help you answer the question.

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<http://www.watersafety.org.nz/resources-and-safety-tips/safety-info-tips/rivers/safety-and-hydrology/floods/>

<http://www.watersafety.org.nz/resources-and-safety-tips/safety-info-tips/rivers/>

<https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/programs/respecttheriver/rivertips>

Chapter Eight

I clamber onboard the ute and Moana makes space for me next to her. Jock jumps up too and goes to his favourite spot, perched in the corner by the cab with his paws on the side of the ute.

Evie clambers and Jock jumps. How else could you get into a car? Make a list of at least five other verbs. Challenge: Can you add an adverb to each verb and put them in a sentence?

Chapter Nine

The people of are evacuated as the conditions are not safe. Those injured, like Evie's mum, are evacuated by helicopter. The other residents are taken by HMS Canterbury of the Royal New Zealand Navy. When most people think of a country's Army, Navy and Air Force, they think of war, but they also help in national emergencies. Research your country's Army, Navy and Air Force and find out about how they have helped in times of national emergency. Who decides if the help of a country's Army, Navy and Air Force are needed? How do local councils help in emergencies?

Resources;

NZ Herald: International warships arrive to help with Kaikoura disaster relief after earthquakes
http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11750203

Maori Television: International fleet comes to the rescue of Kaikoura
<http://www.maoritelevision.com/news/regional/international-fleet-comes-rescue-kaikoura>

Australian Government Department of Defence: Rebuilding Schools in the Philippines
<http://video.defence.gov.au/play/3170#>

Australian Government Department of Defence: Operation Pacific Assist in Vanuatu
<http://video.defence.gov.au/play/2320#>

Chapter Ten

Would you have stayed at Helen's house? Make a pro and con list for staying at Helen's house to help you make your decision.

Chapter Eleven

How is Helen similar to Evie?

What momentous choice does Evie make at the end of the chapter? Why is it so important?

Chapter Twelve

In small groups examine this chapter carefully. How did you feel reading it? Did your heart race? What did the author do to build suspense and tension? Perhaps compare this chapter to the chapter before to help you identify the techniques the author used.

Chapter Thirteen

We have just ridden through the gates of Tartarus and we are still alive.

What are the gates of Tartarus?

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Chapter Fourteen

In this chapter, and the previous chapters, many aftershocks are felt. What causes aftershocks? Are there always aftershocks after an earthquake? What causes them? What other questions do you have about aftershocks that you can find answers to?

Chapter Fifteen

Analyse the descriptive language that has been used in the following sentences.

Gus whinnies again and breaks into a canter, storming down the shoreline and then turning and cantering back again, his eyes always on me.

I look back over my shoulder at the square hulk of grey gunmetal looming up in the sea ahead of us.

The shock of the freezing water knocks the wind out of my lungs as I strike the waves.

The sunshine strikes him and his dapples glisten and his silver mane and tail flow behind him and he is truly magical.

Chapter Sixteen

it felt like we were Greek heroes, returning home from our odyssey at last

The Odyssey referred to in this chapter has influenced much of popular society, as has wider Greek mythology. Can you find examples of Greek mythology in the popular culture of today?

Epilogue

What is an epilogue? What is its purpose? Has that been achieved here?

After You Read the Book

Earthquakes

Think back on what you learnt from your KWL chart you constructed about Earthquakes. Reflect on what a country's Army, Navy and Air Force do to help in times of national emergencies. Are there any other questions you might need answered to understand how a community copes when an earthquake hits, and immediately after the disaster?

Challenge Material:

Rachel Kyte - From disaster response to disaster prevention

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWYcXhMhJF4>

When you think you have enough knowledge, play the following online game and see how well you can prepare a community against a natural disaster. <http://www.stopdisastersgame.org/en/noflash.html>

Mental Health

Evie suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). What is it? How does it affect people? What strategies can they do to cope?

Ted Ed: Understanding Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

<https://ed.ted.com/on/FsjK2xMT>

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In Chapter Two, Evie remembers on her trip to hospital. She looks at a girl who is sick and reflects how you can see that girl is sick, but you can't see that she is sick.

There is something wrong with me. You just can't see it.

Why do you think Evie makes this distinction? How do you think society perceives people with mental illnesses? Why do you think people with mental illness are viewed this way?

Links to the Australian Curriculum

English

Understand that the meaning of sentences can be enriched through the use of noun groups/phrases and verb groups/phrases and prepositional phrases ACELA1493

Incorporate new vocabulary from a range of sources into students' own texts including vocabulary encountered in research ACELA1498

Understand how to use knowledge of letter patterns including double letters, spelling generalisations, morphemic word families, common prefixes and suffixes and word origins to spell more complex words ACELA1779

Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of ACELT1603

Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension ACELT1603

Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts ACELY1692

Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features ACELY1694

Science

Earth's surface changes over time as a result of natural processes and human activity ACSSU075

Science involves making predictions and describing patterns and relationships ACSHE061

Geography

The importance of environments, including natural vegetation, to animals and people ACHASSK088

Civics and Citizenship

The role of local government and the decisions it makes on behalf of the community ACHASS091

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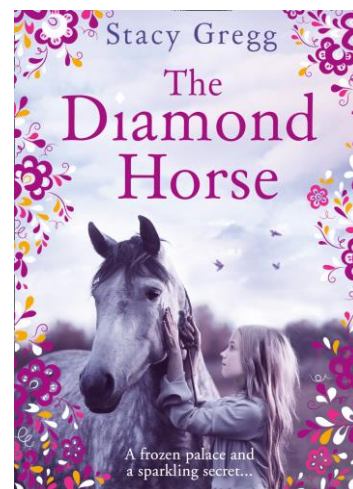
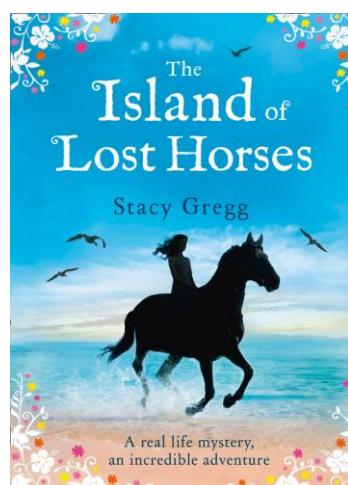
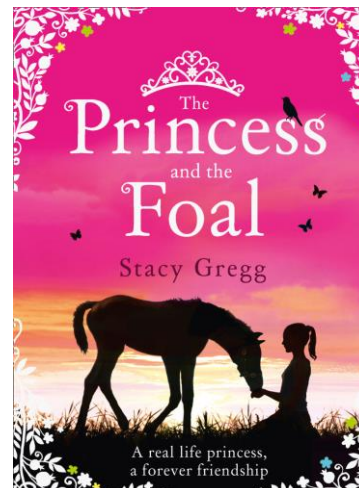
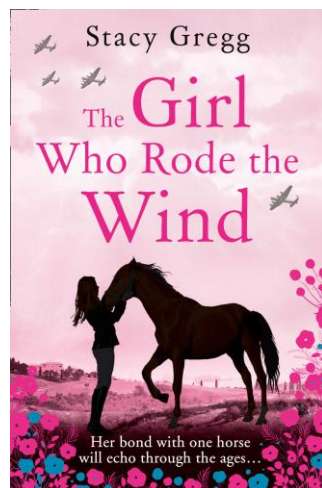
About Author

As a young girl living in New Zealand Stacy Gregg wanted to be two things when she grew up – a horse rider and a writer. She now considers herself very, very lucky to be both at once!

Becoming a writer was the easy part – all she needed was an exercise book and a pen. Stacy wrote loads of poetry and short stories at school and then became a journalist, writing features for magazines and newspapers and working as a fashion writer (v. glamorous and lots of fun!) before her first book in the *Pony Club Secrets* series was published in 2007.

Since then Stacy has written 18 books – 13 in the *Secrets* series and 4 in the *Pony Club Rivals* series as well as her latest novel *The Princess and the Foal*.

<http://stacygregg.co.uk/about-stacy/>



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