



Teacher's Notes

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Writing Style

The Haunting is an excellent read-aloud story, with perfectly timed chapters for a classroom serial; although the class is likely to demand more than one chapter each sitting. The plot moves quickly and engages the reader with a cast of well-realised characters. Tension builds swiftly and readers will find themselves utterly compelled to reach the end of the book. This is a story that will no doubt inspire many creative-writing sessions filled with ghosts, magicians and family secrets.

‘You’re really starting to look haunted, you know . . . sort of yellowish and transparent like cooking oil, and your eyes are funny.’

Eight-year-old Barney has been haunted before. He thought it was something he’d just grow out of, like the imaginary friends his step-mother believes he has. But this time it’s different. Footsteps follow him, there’s a demanding voice barking orders, and Barney begins to feel that sometimes his body is not his own at all . . .

With the help of his sisters, Tabitha and Troy, Barney sets out to uncover the truth about their family secrets and to find out once and for all who is haunting him.



Margaret Mahy (1936–2012) is one of New Zealand’s most celebrated children’s writers. She is the author of more than 150 titles, which have been translated into many different languages and sold around the world. Appointed to the Order of New Zealand in 1993, Mahy also won many global prizes for children’s writers, including the Carnegie Medal and the prestigious Hans Christian Andersen Award.

Suggested Discussion Questions

- † What does it mean to be ‘haunted’? (p.1)
- † How does Barney know he is about to be haunted again? (p.2)
- † Why do you think the ghost appeared to Barney? Do you think the ghost used to haunt Barnaby? (p.6)
- † How did Barney’s sisters and stepmother treat him after he fainted? What did they do to look after him? (p.8)
- † What do you think Dove might have meant by ‘he had a golden piece in his mind’? (p.14)
- † Whose voice does Barney hear as he’s drifting off to sleep? (p.15)
- † Why does Barney like Claire to wear her hair up? What do you think someone who looks ‘motherish’ looks like? (p.16)
- † What do you think Tabitha means when she describes her grandparents as ‘papery’? (p.17)
- † Do you agree with Tabitha that ‘People think being good and being quiet are the same thing in children’? (p.21)
- † Why does Tabitha think it’s so important that she talks a lot? (p. 24)
- † Why do you think Barney thinks Claire is the one person that mustn’t know about the ghost? (p.32)
- † Who do you think would be the best person for Barney to tell about what’s happening? Who could help him? (p.38)
- † Why has Great-Uncle Guy suddenly visited the Palmers? (p. 41)
- † Do you think all the visitors knew that the others were coming? What are they trying to find out? Do you ever get unexpected visitors? (pp.41–48)
- † What does ‘exorcized’ mean? What is ‘mortal terror’? (p.52)
- † Do you agree with Tabitha that Claire will be relieved rather than more worried to hear what’s wrong with Barney? (p.53)
- † How can Tabitha hear the footsteps too? (p.54)
- † Do you agree with Great-Uncle Guy that Barney could just be making everything up? (p.61)
- † What do you predict will be Tabitha’s parents’ response to what Great-Uncle Guy is going to tell them? (p.69)
- † Do you believe Troy when she says she can’t hear the footsteps? (p.80)
- † If Barney is right, and he is not the next Scholar magician, then who could it be? (p.82)

- † Troy and Tabitha have opposing views about sharing things. Troy thinks if sharing won't change things, you should keep things to yourself; Tabitha thinks everything should be out in the open. Who do you agree with? **(pp.86–87)**
- † Who called Mr Palmer and the others to come and help Barney? **(p. 112)**
- † What do you predict Cole wants to do with Barney? **(p.93)**
- † How is Great-Uncle Cole feeling about everything that has been revealed by his mother and Troy? **(pp. 120–126)**
- † If Barney isn't a magician, why is the whole room buzzing with electricity? **(p.101)**
- † What does 'pompously' mean? **(p.127)**

Suggested Activities

Creative Writing Prompts

At the end of the story Troy talks about how she and Great-Uncle Cole can work together to use their magic for the good of the world. Think about some of the problems you see in the world, locally or further away. Imagine you had the powers that Troy and Great-Uncle Cole possess and use what you imagine to write a story about you doing good in the world.

OR

Imagine someone in your family went missing. Where did they go, why did they go and how did everyone left behind feel?

Art

On page 49 Barney describes the messages he is receiving from the ghost. We find out later that the messages are images sent from Great-Uncle Barnaby to show Barney his journey. Using the art media you are studying this term, make a picture to show a favourite place that you have been, or dreamed of going to. Use the internet to find reference photos if you need more information to create your image.

About the Author

Margaret Mahy is one of New Zealand's most famous authors. Choose five of the tasks below and complete them to learn more about Margaret Mahy. Work in pairs to digitally record your findings.

Discuss with your teacher the most appropriate way of sharing your video e.g. the class blog, the school website, with another class etc.

- † Find and review a Margaret Mahy book
- † Using photos from the internet, create a piece of art that shows one of her characters
- † Find a Margaret Mahy story in a school journal and create a cover for that story
- † List five questions you would ask Margaret Mahy if you were able to interview her
- † Find ten interesting facts about Margaret Mahy – the stranger the better!
- † Watch the excerpts of *A Tall Long Faced Tale*
<https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/a-tall-long-faced-tale-2008>
- † Track down someone that knew Margaret Mahy and interview them
- † List five questions you would ask a librarian about Margaret Mahy

Family Tree

Using the information you have from *The Haunting*, make a Scholar and Palmer family tree. Consider adding pictures of the characters. Think about colour, design and fonts and draft the family tree before making a presentation copy.