

'Thrilling, funny
and mysterious'
BOOKLIST



the catalogue
of the universe
Margaret Mahy

AUTHOR OF THE INTERNATIONALLY BESTSELLING
THE CHANGEOVER

Teacher's Notes

Written by Sarina Dickson

Synopsis

Angela and Tycho seem an unlikely pair — she is beautiful and confident, he is awkward and quietly intellectual. Like the great philosophers they study, to Angela and Tycho it seems the universe can be ordered; their own lives cannot. As their family struggles swirl around them, they are suddenly desperate to discover where they fit in. But when a search for answers uncovers long-buried secrets, these two 18-year-olds will learn that sometimes the tough decisions we make have lifelong effects.

The Catalogue of the Universe is a moving and lyrical story of adolescence, sexual exploration, teenage love and family secrets.



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

CHAPTER ONE

- † List the clues in the first chapter that tell us what time period the story is set in. Estimate Angela's date of birth.
- † What was Dido doing in the moonlight?
- † Summarise what we know about Angela and her life from the first chapter.
- † What is a 'romantic notion'?
- † Do you think the version of Angela's life that Dido tells her is the whole truth?
- † What does it mean to look at someone 'narrowly'?

CHAPTER TWO

- † Tycho's family is very different to Angela's, but can you find any similarities?
- † Do you think Richard and Tycho are justified in their reasons for being angry with Africa? Why, or why not?
- † What do we know about Africa so far?

CHAPTER THREE

- † What happened to Tycho's dad that changed their life forever?
- † List the knock-on effects of the accident.
- † Why is Richard so confused by Tycho's relationship with Angela?
- † Why does Tycho describe Angela as a good friend but also a 'continual torment'?
- † What is a 'changeling'? Why does Africa call Tycho a changeling?
- † Why might Mrs Potter be cautious of Tycho's friendship with Angela?

- † What does ‘take the rough with the smooth’ mean?
- † What are ‘gesticulations’?

CHAPTER FOUR

- † Why doesn’t Angela want Robin to call for her at home? What excuse does she use?
- † What is a ‘*fait accompli*’? Can you think of a real-life example?
- † What was life like for Tycho as a child?
- † Who is the original ‘Tycho’ that Tycho and Angela refer to? What century did he live in? What was he famous for? (hint: scientist)

CHAPTER FIVE

- † What is an ‘Ionian view of the world’?
- † What reaction do you think Angela was hoping for from her father? What did she get instead?
- † Reread the last sentence of Chapter Five. Make a prediction of what might happen next.

CHAPTER SIX

- † List the sequence of events that led Angela to find her father.
- † Do you think Angela is realistic in her wish to have a relationship with her father?
- † What might the consequences be for him if he were to get to know her better?

CHAPTER SEVEN

- † Angela repeats the saying that Tycho made up and shared with her the day before, ‘Every day we go from tooth and claw to truth and law and back again...’ What do you think that means?
- † What kind of relationship do Dido and Angela have with their neighbours?

CHAPTER EIGHT

- † Predict the outcome of Angela's meeting with her father. What would the best-case scenario be? Or the worst-case scenario?
- † Why doesn't Tycho stop Angela even though he thinks she's about to make a mistake?

CHAPTER NINE

- † Explain what Dido means when she says "if we'd been with you we'd have been masked from our true selves". Do you think she's right?
- † Is Angela more upset about losing her image of her father or of her mother? Why?
- † Is Angela justified in her anger towards her mother?
- † What might Dido's motivation have been to lie to Angela?

CHAPTER TEN

- † If you could choose a middle name for yourself what would it be? Why?
- † Is Tycho being a true friend to Angela? Would you have responded in the same way?
- † Do you agree with Tycho that the most people would rather be beautiful than clever?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- † Why didn't Mrs Potter tell Tycho that Dido had rung?
- † What events led up to Tycho spending the night without his family?

CHAPTER TWELVE

- † What happened that made Tycho understand Dido's warning about Angela standing on a cliff and accidentally falling?
- † What does the T-shirt that Angela gives to Tycho mean?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

- † Why did Angela and Tycho have to walk to Angela's?
- † How was their relationship changed? How did the change manifest?
- † What happened as they walked up the hill? What warnings was the reader given in the lead up to the event that it might happen?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

- † What does 'prodigious' mean?
- † What is a 'nimbus'?
- † Who is the Adam that is referred to on page 151?
- † How would the situation be different if it were set in the present time?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

- † What caused the accident?
- † What does the author mean when she refers to Tycho as "a savior of some kind, yet coloured like a butcher"?
- † What starts to happen in Tycho's mind after the crash and again when the reporter arrives?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

- † What happened that prevented Roland from supporting Dido?
- † Why did Dido make up the story that she told Angela about her conception and birth?
- † How does Angela find a way to forgive Dido?

Suggested Activities

Missing chapter

Throughout the book Dido is concerned that the road needs to be fed to keep it appeased. Write a missing chapter in which Dido makes sure that it's not herself or Angela that get hurt on the road. Consider how Dido may have been involved in their neighbour's accident.

Character astrology signs

After reading brief descriptions of the astrology or sun signs, decide which signs you think three of the main characters from *The Catalogue of the Universe* were born under. Write an explanation of why you think they fit the sign, drawing on their actions, attitudes, and thoughts from the book.

Cartoon squares

Create a series of six drawings in six squares that shows a significant event in the novel. Under each picture or cartoon, write a few lines of explanation.

Movie Recommendations

From all the movies you've seen in the last couple of years, pick three you would recommend that your favourite character see. Give a brief summary of each movie and explain why you think the character should see it.