



Teacher's Notes

Written by Sarina Dickson

Writing Style

Reality and the supernatural intertwine in this exciting and chilling novel. The Hamilton family and guests gather at their bach, Carnival's Hide, for their Christmas celebrations, with hope of a restful break. The warm, chaotic family atmosphere is chilled by the unexpected arrival of three sinister brothers. The family wrongly identify them as expected visitors but only 17-year-old Harry, the middle daughter, is close to seeing the truth. Are these brothers her own invention, or are they truly descendants of Teddy Carnival who drowned there many years earlier? As the brothers gradually reveal their purpose, long-hidden family secrets and drama are also unfurled.

In *The Tricksters* Margaret Mahy explores themes familiar to her other works: adolescence, sexual exploration, teenage love and family secrets and dynamics. Teachers please note that on pp. 102-103 a sexual assault is heavily inferred and revealed to be thwarted further in the story.



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

PART 1: MIDSUMMER

- † Anthony is an English visitor to New Zealand at Christmas. How will his Christmas be different from the ones he has in England? **(p.3)**
- † How does the author describe the wind? Does she use simile, metaphor, or something else? **(p.4)**
- † How did Carnival's Hide get its name? **(p.7)**
- † What does Harry predict will happen when her mother arrives? **(p.11)**
- † What does Harry do in the attic? **(pp.12-14)**
- † What does 'She had turned herself into her own hiding place.' mean? **(pp.15-16)**
- † Harry's first secret is that she is a writer, why do you think she needs to keep that a secret? How might her siblings react if they knew? What is Harry's dream for her writing? Predict what Harry's other secret might be. **(p.16)**
- † What is a 'pommy accent'? What is the origin of the word 'pommy'? **(p.18)**
- † What does 'sonorously' mean? What is a synonym for sonorously? **(p.20)**
- † What do the children do to let Teddy know that they are at Carnival's Hide? **(pp.22-23)**
- † Who does Harry believe she can see kneeling on the rock? **(p.28)**
- † Why doesn't Serena want to eat the plums? Why do you think it's important to Naomi that they get eaten? **(p.32)**
- † Why did Anthony feel as if he had already met Christobel before she arrived? **(p.35)**
- † Why do you think Anthony blushes when he's introduced to Christobel? What does she say that embarrasses him? **(p.37)**
- † Why does Naomi feel guilty about buying biscuits? If the story was written now, do you think the character of Naomi would feel the same way? **(p.44)**
- † What is a 'needling smile'? Describe what it would look like. **(p.47)**

- † Why did Christobel ask if the milk bottles were put out? Why were they put out? **(p. 51)**
- † Which characters in Chapter 5 began to sense that there was an unseen presence at Carnival's Hide?
- † Where had Harry seen a 'foxy smile' before? **(p.58)**
- † What does 'repentantly' mean? What does it mean to be sorry, but not at all repentantly? **(p.62)**
- † Why did the author choose 'Carnival' as the surname for this family? How does it give a double meaning? **(p.70)**
- † How does Ovid know the stewed plums are sour? **(p.72)**
- † 'I can believe six impossible things before breakfast' is part of a famous quote. What is the whole quote and who said it? **(p.76)**
- † Anthony is suspicious of the Carnival brothers. Do you think he is right to be? Should the others be warier? **(p.86)**
- † What does Christobel mean when she says Ovid is 'doing quite a heavy line with Christobel'? **(p.91)**
- † What does Hadfield mean when he says about Felix, 'He might take over, without Papa here to beat him out of us'? **(p.113)**
- † What is Hadfield's excuse for how he got his black eye? How did he really get it? **(p.114)**
- † Do you think it's safe for Christobel to go to Gorse Bay with the Carnival brothers? **(p.117)**
- † Why might Harry want to try out being Christobel, even for just a while? **(p.126)**
- † Who is Jacob that the author refers to, and from what story do he and the angel come from? **(p.126)**

PART II: CHRISTMAS

- † What is a tuatara's pineal eye? Is it a real thing? Do any other animals have them? **(p.158)**
- † What does Christobel threaten to do if Naomi sends the Carnival brothers away? **(p.166)**
- † Is Christobel upset about Robert and Emma's growing friendship? Why, or why not? **(p. 171)**

- † Do you think Naomi should have been so forgiving about the hallway? Were you surprised that no-one else was angry about it? **(p.179)**
- † Why were Hadfield and Ovid angry that Felix had been with Harry? **(p.181)**
- † Why does Harry tell Ovid that he's jealous of Felix? Is he? **(p.186)**
- † Should Harry tell her parents what's happening between her and the Carnival brothers? Should she be more frightened of them than she is? **(p.190)**
- † Why is Christobel envious of Emma? Is it an even friendship? **(p.196)**
- † Why do you think Hadfield and Ovid have so much power over Felix? Why does he look at them for approval before deciding not to follow Harry up to the house to get the pate and crackers? **(p.205)**
- † Do you think Felix is right about Harry and Ovid being similar? **(p. 208)**
- † What are the tongues of Babel? What is a citadel? Can a person be a citadel? In what ways? **(p.210)**
- † Who do you think Anthony really is? Could he just be an innocent bystander to these events? Which phrase does he use that one of the Carnival brothers previously used? Where might he be getting the information about the King and Goddess from? **(p.215)**
- † Who, or what, is the Christmas King, with the starry crest and arms hung with seasonal jewels? **(p.218)**
- † What do you predict Naomi's secret is? Do you think the Carnivals have worked it out? Are they really blackmailing her or are they just guessing at something? **(p.229)**
- † Why does Ovid think that Prince Valery is particularly charming? **(p.232)**
- † Who is Pandora that the author compares Harry to? What was Pandora's box of troubles? **(p.243)**
- † Do you think Christobel was really the only one that didn't know who Tibby's father was? Do you think Harry always knew or just pieced it together over the holiday? **(p.249)**

PART III: NEW YEAR

- † Did Benny know Tibby was his little sister? What explanation did he give himself about why Tibby lives with Emma and not his family? **(p.266)**
- † How did Naomi come to terms with Jack and Emma's affair? How did she rationalise it and make it bearable in her own mind? **(p.268)**
- † What does Harry observe about Robert's relationship with Tibby? Why is Tibby familiar to Robert? **(p. 274)**

Suggested Activities

Sibling Rivalry

Compare and contrast the personalities and relationships of the Carnival brothers with the personalities and relationships of the Hamilton sisters. How are their relationships with their fathers similar or different? Can you see similar dynamics within both sets of siblings? Show examples to support your opinion.

Harry's Christmas Diary

Harry is given a new diary for Christmas from Christobel. Write the first three entries in her diary beginning from when she returns home to 'the city over the hill'. Give the entries a setting by choosing where in New Zealand you think Harry could live. Include her fears and worries for the new school year, or heading into the workforce and in at least one entry include some reflection she may have about the holiday, the Carnivals and Tibby.

Carnival's Hide

Throughout the book the house takes on so much meaning that it becomes more than just the setting and almost a character of the story. The characters refer to it often and describe it in a lot of detail. Using the information from the story draw the house and garden, or choose a room in the house to draw. Include all the details you can recall from the story.

Community Resources

Throughout the story, and inferred in the backstory, the young characters face several challenging situations, for example, Emma faces life as a teen mother without the father's support and Harry is attacked on the beach by Hadsfield. Using your local knowledge, library or school notice boards, and the internet compile a list of resources that one or more of the characters could use to seek help or support.

Family Snaps

Choose some key moments from the story and illustrate them with captions for the Hamilton family Christmas album.