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Teaching Notes

## *Zeustian Logic*

By Sabrina Malcolm



### **Synopsis**

When Zeus, king of the gods, made enemies, he just hurled a thunderbolt at them. That's one way to deal with your problems.

Tuttle, a.k.a. Zeustian Logic, has problems of his own. His father was a famous mountain guide who didn't come back, lost in the Everest Death Zone. His little brother has gone quiet. Boyd next door is out to get him.



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At least Tuttle has the stars. Through the telescope things fall into shape: eagle, serpent's tail, scorpion, hunter, all those brilliant dots on the black. Everything's out there, indifferent and immense.

### **The Author**

**Sabrina Malcolm** is a writer, illustrator and graphic designer with a background in botany and geology.

Her first picture book, *Blue Moon Bird*, was published in 2013. She illustrated two books shortlisted for the NZ Post Children's Book Awards: *Koro's Medicine* by Melanie Drewery and *The Flytrap Snaps* by Johanna Knox. The former was listed as a White Raven book, and the latter shortlisted for the LIANZA Esther Glen Award; both were chosen as Storylines Notable Books.

Her illustrations have also appeared in scientific publications and the *School Journal*.

Sabrina has a Masters of Design in Illustration from Massey University, has taught at Massey in illustration and design, and has received a DINZ Gold Pin award for design excellence.

### **Themes**

This big-hearted novel about the aftermath of tragedy has several themes.

The themes of loss, not knowing and the emotional fallout from these are explored as Tuttle, his family all try to deal with the disappearance of Dad on Mount Everest, the accompanying accusations surrounding the death of his client on the mountain, and the significant effects of these pressures on each family member.

Journalism and sensationalism are also seen in the novel as the journalist hounds Tuttle and his family in order to get the true story about Dad.

Courage, strength and determination in the face of adversity are also themes. These attributes help Tuttle as he steps up to run the household, take care of his brother and mother, as well as try to deal with the bullying tactics of his next door neighbour, Boyd, and the snooping journalist.

The theme of friendship is also apparent, as Attila is always there to support Tuttle, whether in person, at school or online at home. The staff of the observatory and planetarium also form a supportive group and a safe place for Tuttle to go to when he needs to escape his dysfunctional home life.



Interests, obsessions and passions are evident throughout the book. From Tuttle's obsessions with astronomy and Greek mythology to Attila's acronym craze, or from Mrs Ziegler's passion for English literature to Boyd's love of his car, the interests of the characters help and hinder them as they attempt to make sense of their place in the world around them.

Anger, forgiveness and acceptance, are other themes illustrated. Tuttle realises that he will never truly know what happened to his Dad on the mountain. He sees that his Mum has also been blaming herself for the tragedy. When they both come to terms with how they have been feeling they are able to accept the situation and start living more harmoniously again.

### Activities

1. Before reading the book, look at the cover image and title. Discuss what you think the book might be about?
  
2. The book is rich with language features. Define and find one other example from the book of each of the following, then list any other language features you may discover within the text:
  - A. Simile - 'It was like some superhero athlete was doing javelin practice.' (p. 9)
  - B. Onomatopoeia - 'Hooning' (p. 4)
  - C. Puns - 'constellation prize' (p. 108)
  - D. Alliteration - 'Prince of Peaks' (p. 3)
  - E. Idioms - 'turn a blind eye' (p. 39)
  - F. Anagrams - 'mystic parka' (p. 51)
  - G. Acronyms - 'a.k.a.' (p. 13)
  
3. The book explores the relationship between Tuttle and his family, including his brother and mother. In groups, discuss the following: Do you like Tuttle and his family as characters? What do you think of their reactions to different situations and what do their reactions tell us about them and their personalities? Do you think they have a realistic familial relationship? Why or why not? Do you believe that their relationships develop and change through the book? If so how, and what are the main events which contribute to the development and change?



In pairs, write character studies on three characters, other than Tuttle. Begin by making a chart to list the main character traits they display. How do their particular traits affect the part they play in the novel?

4. Tuttle states that, 'Emotional support is my speciality' (p. 143) and further expresses how he views himself as '...a chip off the old block - arrogant, tactless and full of big opinions. And a coward.' (p. 158). List what other things he says about himself and those around him, such as Fen, Mum, Boyd and Attila. Do you agree with his opinions? Find examples of, if and when, they display the characteristics. Do Tuttle's opinions of himself and others change by the end of the book? What do you think of their reactions to different situations and what do their reactions tell us about them and their personalities? Do you think they teach each other any significant lessons about themselves and other characters? If so, what? Do you believe that their relationships develop and change through the book? If so, what are the main events which contribute to the development and change? In pairs, think of five examples from the book where this is proven to be true.
5. What does the book say about adults and their influence over, and opinions of, children and the importance of adults during difficult times? List examples of episodes when the adults in the novel have been either a help or a hindrance to Tuttle. Then using the drama convention of 'hot-seating', in pairs, choose two of the characters to embody, one of which should be an adult, for example Tuttle and Mum, Celia and Fen, Boyd and the policewoman. Get the class to ask questions about what it is like to be these characters, your relationship and how you feel about each other. Write up your scene in script form, like those found throughout the novel.
6. Draw a picture of one of the characters based on their physical description, such as Tuttle (p. 5), Fen (p. 7 & 21), Mrs Ziegler (pp. 14-15), Dad (p. 20), Phoebe (p. 34) or Mike (p. 64).
7. The narrative of the book is in first person. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Is it effective? Choose a passage about one of the main events of the book. Rewrite the passage in third person narrative from the point of view of another character, other than Tuttle, for example, Boyd, Attila, Fen or Mum. Think about how their perspective of the event might differ from Tuttle's.



8. The book is set in Wellington, New Zealand and is full of descriptions of different interiors and exteriors, such as Dad's shed (p. 21), the trees on Upland Road (p. 29) and the planetarium (p. 84). Choose a description from the book and draw your interpretation of it. Then, write a description of an interior or exterior that you are familiar with, for example, your classroom, school grounds, bedroom, a local park, etc. In pairs, draw a picture based on your partner's descriptions.
  
9. Complete one of the following tasks inspired by the book:
  - a. Tuttle and Attila each have interests and passions, such as Greek mythology, astronomy and computer gaming. Find and research something that piqued your interest in the book, such as, Zeus (p. 1), karma (p. 13), telescopes (p. 60), the NASA Pioneer 11 space probe (p. 2), vertigo (p. 19), the Beaufort Scale (p. 77), St Elmo's Fire (p. 157), Nepal, Mount Everest and K2 (p. 2), etc. Write up your findings in the style of an illustrated children's encyclopedia.
  - b. Tuttle and Attila's English teacher, Mrs Zeigler 'salivates over unusual words' (p. 4). Create a glossary for any unusual or unfamiliar words that you have found within the book, for example, 'incredulous' (p. 11), 'bedlam' (p. 14) or 'wizened' (p. 15).
  - c. Tuttle states that Boyd 'with a few billion other people' wreck star viewing with their cars which belch out smoke (p. 5 & p. 11). Divide the class into two teams and debate the for and against stances of introducing electric cars in order to help the environment.
  - d. In their English class, Tuttle and Attila have to undertake a chosen Novel Project (pp. 14-15). Choose one of the other books mentioned in the novel, such as *The Sword in the Stone* (p. 7), *Lord of the Flies* (p. 17) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (p. 17) to do a novel study on.
  - e. Tuttle enjoys website design (p. 24) and gets a job as the Bentham Observatory Social Media consultant (p. 195). Research your closest observatory and/or planetarium and design a website page about what it has to offer a visitor.
  - f. Tuttle's Mum used to design bottle labels. Design a bottle label for Tuttle's homebrewed ginger beer (p. 204). Create a marketing campaign to sell this product. The campaign could include elements such as pamphlets, radio jingles, posters, slogans, television advertisements, etc.
  - g. The counsellor asks Tuttle to write his Dad a letter (pp. 6-7 & p. 207). Write this letter to Dad either from Tuttle, Fen, Mum or Mike's point of view.



10. Describe how the tension builds and falls away during the book. Find a passage in the novel that is of high intensity, such as, when Boyd and Derek chase Tuttle and Fen in the car (p. 72), and another of low intensity. Copy both out and compare the language used (choice of words, length of sentences, the pace at which details are revealed). How is language used to create intensity?
11. Create an illustrated timeline of the main events of the novel, or choose your favourite moment from the book and create your own artistic interpretation of it. For example, a diorama, painting, model, poem, cartoon strip, movie storyboard, video, etc. Write a brief artist's statement to accompany your interpretation.
12. The book uses different forms of media for reporting and discussing Tuttle's father's potentially fatal mountaineering expedition on Mount Everest, including blogs, podcasts (pp. 40-41), newspapers (p. 44) and magazines (p. 80 & p. 83). Write a newspaper report or magazine article about Tuttle's Dad and what may have happened on Mount Everest (pp. 66-67). Research and use the style and language that would have been used in your chosen form of media.
13. Tuttle likes 'the randomness of Greek mythology' (p. 1) and tells many of the myths to his brother, Fen throughout the novel. Choose one of the myths he tells in the novel, such as the myths about Ganymede (p. 29), Helios (p. 35), Rigel and Betelgeuse (p. 70), Asclepius (p. 107), Lycaon (pp. 122) or Castor and Pollux (p. 144). In small groups, write, design, bind and publish an illustrated children's story book based on your chosen myth. Read your story to a younger class level.
14. In groups, imagine you are film producers attempting to gain financial backing to turn *Zeustian Logic* into a feature film. Write up your proposal and include one or two scenes from the novel as a film script and your choices for the soundtrack, casting, location, costumes, etc. Or imagine the novel is going to be turned into a stage play. Design a suitable set, programme notes and advertising posters for the play.
15. Review the book for your favourite magazine or website. What did you like about the book? Why? What did you dislike about the book? Why? Give it a rating, such as stars or a number out of ten. Consider the following questions when writing your review:
  - a. Which characters appealed to you the most? The least?



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- b. How did the story make you feel as it unfolded?
- c. Which ideas in the book awakened your interest?
- d. What did you dislike, or find boring?
- e. Do you think this is a significant book?
- f. Why is this book important for today's readers?