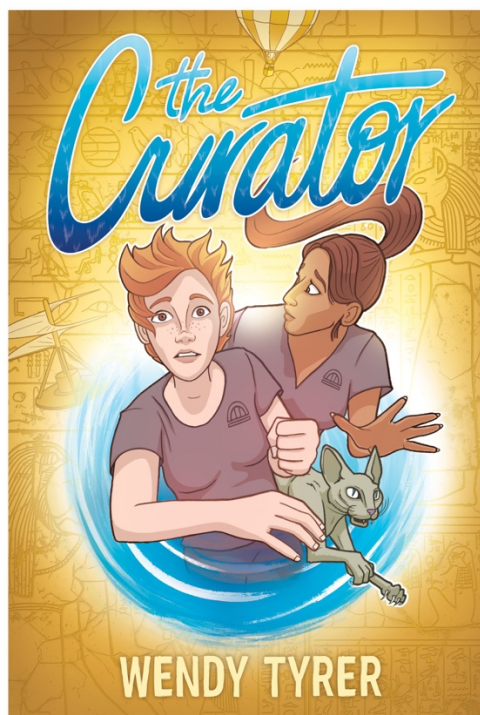


THE CURATOR



PEEK INSIDE

Written and illustrated by [Wendy Tyrer](#)

ISBN: 9781923543010 (paperback)

Reading age: 12+

ABOUT THE BOOK

All around the world, artists are disappearing. But struggling art student Mimi isn't too concerned—she's not a 'real artist' yet.

When a peculiar curator and an equally strange cat turn up in the gallery where Mimi works, she is pulled into an extraordinary adventure that will force her to make a life-changing choice.

What would you give up to become famous?

KEY THEMES

- Choices and challenges for young people
- Defining 'art' and what makes it good
- Portraiture
- Graphic novels and comics

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AUTHOR'S NOTE



Making *The Curator*, I wanted to capture that magical, slightly surreal feeling I get when wandering through galleries and museums.

I've always loved galleries and museums, especially ones that feel a little bit otherworldly. Mammoths posed in front of painted prehistoric landscapes, stern portraits staring down from sombre walls, ancient vases glowing under dusty light—all of it sparks my imagination. That sense of the unknown and of hidden stories and forgotten artefacts inspires me.

The National Gallery of Victoria has always held that feeling for me, partly because of its iconic water wall. There's something magical about the way light plays with the water running down the glass surface.

I set out to write a mystery adventure with dramatic reveals and chase scenes, but looking back, it's not the twists and turns that stand out—it's the friendship between the two main characters, Mimi and Nahal. In many ways, the story reflects my own creative journey, exploring the choices a young woman faces in balancing career and relationships. I didn't want to write a book I would be bored to read, so I've also packed the story with fun. Vengeful gods, magic portals, bad jokes, flying machines, and daring escapes.

During this process, I've learned about the power of the page-turn panel in the bottom right corner, how to set up a gag, and that you don't need to cram every detail into every frame. At the end of this long journey, I'm still curious and have so much more to learn! How exciting!

Wendy Tyrer

HOW TO USE THESE TEACHING & LEARNING NOTES

These notes are designed to accompany *THE CURATOR* in Years 7-10 Australian classrooms.

They provide:

- key inquiry questions based on themes.
- suggested learning activities which link the book to English curriculum strands of language, literature and literacy as well as Visual Arts.
- an exploration of graphic novels as a format.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Choices and challenges young people face

- What has Mimi learned about herself by the end of the book and how does this change her approach to her future?
- Would you have made the same ultimate choice (with the curator, Simon, in the balloon) that Mimi did? Why or why not?
- What has Nahal learned about herself by the end of the book?
- Why is Mimi initially in awe of Simon? Does her attitude toward him change? If so, when and why?
- Do you think Simon's Utopia (where art and artists are set apart from society) is a good idea? Discuss pros and cons.
- What would you be willing to sacrifice for your art or your passion, e.g. to make a premier sporting team or be cast in a Hollywood film?
- Would you like to become famous? Discuss pros and cons.
- What might the challenges be if you pursued an artistic career?
- Can you identify four instances where Mimi and Nahal support each other? What do these instances reveal about the girls' friendship?

What is art?

The question of 'What is art?' has been debated throughout time. Even some hieroglyphics found in famous galleries across the world have been revealed to be as mundane as grocery lists.

- What other 'originally mundane' artefacts might be considered art?
- Should graphic novels be considered art? Why or why not?
- Can everyday objects or activities (like fashion, memes or playlists) be considered art? Why or why not?
- Why do artists make art?
- What does Rachel (the artist who makes the cats) think about Simon? How do her opinions of art and artists differ from his?
- What type of art do you like? Why do you like it?

Art and politics

Art is often political in nature. There are many art movements and artists that are intentionally political.

- Find some examples of political art that aimed to change opinions and/or inspire action.
- Is it possible to enjoy an artwork if you disagree with its message or messenger?
- Some First Nations peoples' artworks function as records of history and environmental knowledge. How might understanding these artworks as knowledge systems challenge Western ideas of art and what it is for?



- Analyse how minorities and marginalised artists are represented in galleries.
- What factors might influence visibility, recognition and funding in the art world?

The value of art

People flock to galleries to see artworks by famous artists that are worth millions of dollars, art from First Nations artists is often valued differently to Western art, and parents display their kid's finger paintings on the fridge.

- Consider how art is valued in different cultures and societies. Why is one artwork valued while another is not?
- Does the value of art change with time? Can you think of examples?
- Who gets to decide what counts as art—the creator, the audience, or institutions like galleries and museums?
- How does money and fame affect how people judge whether something is art?

Where is art found?

When we think of art, we might imagine seeing it in a gallery space. But art can be found in many places. For example, the street artist Banksy has changed the way many people value graffiti.

- How do artists like Banksy challenge traditional ideas about where art belongs?
- Does the location of art affect its value or meaning?
- Can art that is temporary or illegal still be meaningful?

Graphic novels

Graphic novels are book-length comics. In the past, comics were thought to *corrupt young minds*. Even now, they are sometimes still seen as disposable entertainment for children only.

- Why did people (and some still do) believe comics were harmful to young people?
- Why have graphic novels become more accepted today?
- What art forms today do you think might be more respected in the future?
- Although debated, one definition of a comic is 'sequential art' (that is, art in a sequence). Does that mean that Egyptian hieroglyphics are a type of comic? How about the famous, Bayeux Tapestry?
- What are some other formats of storytelling besides print media (books)? Are all formats equally valuable? Why, or why not?



LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Portraits across time

Research how portraits have changed across time, from ancient Egyptian carvings, lush Renaissance paintings and blocky Cubist faces to digital art and even selfies.

- What does each portrait style reveal about that time and culture?
- Who were the subjects of these portraits?

Gallery visit

Have you ever visited a large gallery? (If not, you can usually view a gallery's collection online)

- What adjectives would you use to describe the building? See if you can choose an adjective aligned with each of the five senses (describe what could you see, hear, smell, feel and taste).
- Whose art is represented? What time periods, cultures, genders and styles of art are included or excluded?
- What does the gallery's collection reveal about whose art matters?
- What value do you think these institutions have in our society?
- Would you like to go again?

The self portrait

Explore the work of an artist who produced both commissioned portraits of others and self-portraits. You could look at artists such as Abdul Abdullah, Alice Neel, Brett Whitely or Joseph Ducreux, or explore past works in the Archibald Prize.

- How do an artist's portraits of others and their self-portraits differ? What do these differences communicate about the artist's feelings about the subject of the painting?
- Choose a partner. For ten minutes, draw or paint a portrait of your friend's face, then swap roles and sit still as your friend draws or paints a portrait of your face.
- Discuss how each role felt (sitter and artist) with the class. Which did you prefer?
- Are you surprised by the way your likeness has been captured? What would you have done differently if you were drawing or painting yourself?



LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Tell a story (in comic form)

Using the template on the next page, create your own short comic.

TIPS

- Stories often involve a problem a character needs to solve and/or a conflict between characters.
- You can tell a funny story, explore an emotional event, create an imaginary fantasy world, kill a dragon (or have a cup of tea with it) or just write down a conversation you had with a friend.
- Don't worry too much about how good it looks. Stick figures are fine!
- Remember to leave room for speech bubbles, thought bubbles and sounds (POW!) where needed.
- If you don't want to draw, you can take photos and print them out to tell a story.



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