

A close-up photograph of two hands, one from a person with a darker skin tone and one from a person with a lighter skin tone, shaking together. A thick cloud of white powder or dust is falling from the point of contact, creating a soft, ethereal atmosphere. The background is a blurred blue color.

# cloudbwish

fiona wood

PAN MACMILLAN TEACHERS' NOTES

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by Fiona Wood

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## Introduction

'Wishes that came true were sometimes a thing.

Wishes that came true *because of magic* were not a thing.' (p 30)

Vân Ước Phan is in the first week of her International Baccalaureate (IB) program at Crowthorne Grammar School. Her 'hardworking, first-generation-immigrant, barely-English-speaking-Vietnamese Australian parents' (p 3) yearn for her to be a doctor. But Vân secretly wants to be an artist (nourishing fantasy); and to hook up with Billy Gardiner (pointless fantasy). Her friend and neighbour Jess is still at Collingwood Girls Secondary College, which Vân had also attended until she obtained her scholarship, but still acts as her only 'confidant'.

Her life is teetering between the struggles with her parents' expectations; the mysteries surrounding her parents' past; her mother's post-traumatic stress disorder; prejudice against her background; her desire to fit in but unwillingness to do so; and her unrequited love for Billy Gardiner. Vân Ước's love for Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* (p 25) underpins her desire to take control of her life instead of just wishing things might be different.

But when Billy Gardiner starts being 'nice' to her, Vân Ước wonders if it was in fact her wish that did it! Fairytale happenings thereafter puncture the narrative, with next a beautiful cardigan appearing just when she needs it.

As in her earlier novels, Fiona Wood has concocted a delightfully contemporary realistic novel which, although it deals with serious issues, is also a romantic comedy, a rite of passage narrative, and a school story. Vân Ước likes Billy; Michael likes Sibylla; Jessica is a 'lesbian-in-waiting'; Holly likes Billy. But once again, the real issue here, is discovering one's real and authentic self. Each of these characters is discovering friends and enemies, finding out who to trust, and who to be wary of; trying to establish themselves as separate people from their parents; finding out what really matters in life. Life is full of wishes, and can be like a fairytale maze in which we each discover that the path is littered with twists and turns; with false or dangerous paths.

This novel is another sequel or companion to Fiona Wood's first novel, *Six Impossible Things*, and second novel, *Wildlife*. Vân Ước, the main protagonist, is friendly with Lou, who appeared in *Six Impossible Things* and was the narrator in *Wildlife* (in which she had just transferred to Crowthorne Grammar School and attended the Mt Fairweather outdoor camp). Vân Ước was also at the camp along with Billy Gardiner, Michael Cassidy, Sibylla Quinn and Holly Broderick, each of whom appear in this latest novel as well.

In *Cloudwish*, Vân Ước persistently and hilariously asks herself 'What would Jane [Eyre] do?' But by its end she knows that it's more important to know what she wants to do, and to simply do it, despite the consequences.

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## Australian Curriculum Areas

The following codes (which are indicative only broadly of the relationship between the points or activities below and the relevant Curriculum area), have been created to link to the Australian Curriculum as follows:

### **STRAND / MODE / GENERAL CAPABILITIES CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES e.g. Language / Writing / Intercultural Understanding (LA/W/IU)**

**STRANDS:** LA – Language; LT – Literature; LY – Literacy

**MODES:** W – Writing; L – Listening; R – Reading; S1 – Speaking

### **GENERAL CAPABILITIES CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES:**

Literacy (LY)

Intercultural understanding (IU)

Personal and social capability (PSC)

Information and communication technology capability (ICTC)

Sustainability (S2)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (ATSIC)

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (AAEA)

Ethical behaviour (EB)

Critical and creative thinking (CCT)

For more detail re curriculum areas, refer to the **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)** [www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum.html)

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## Themes

- **Rite of Passage into Adulthood and Individuality** (LY/R/PSC)

‘But maybe life couldn’t be kept incubating indefinitely.’ (p 218)

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước’s journey is to discover not only what it is to be true to herself, but who amongst her friends and associates are ‘authentic’ as well; to discover the beauty under the surface of those who either seem ordinary or who put on a different character to impress people. Her art project also expresses this theme. Does she discover her true self by the end of the novel?

*Discussion Point:* ‘Personal and specific were not muscles that got a lot of flexing in her family.’ (p 38) Vân Ước’s struggles to become an adult are complicated by her home life where she is asked to assume the role of adult (as translator, carer for her mother, worker), and yet is restricted by her parents in what she is allowed to do. ‘She wouldn’t mind having a run of just being a regular teenager.’ (p 61) She frequently resorts to taking advantage of her parents’ lack of understanding of the school system in order to get her own way e.g. studying art. How difficult is it for a teenager like Vân Ước to achieve personal freedom?

*Discussion Point:* ‘It clicked for her, the thing about Billy – he was no longer comfortable in the role he’d been assigned. He looked the part. He knew it perfectly. It just didn’t play so well anymore.’ (p 156) Part of growing up is rejecting models which don’t fit your personal identity. Discuss.

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước is standing on the edge of a precipice: ‘some days the horizon stretched right out. It was a scary feeling for someone who’d lived a cautious life.’ (p 222) Is she likely to keep exploring and taking risks in future?

- **School Study Pressures** (LY/R/PSC & EB)

‘How much spare time did the IB curriculum developers think students had? They were kidding if they thought human, let alone humane, was going to get a run; there was barely enough time to be efficient study-bots.’ (p 16)

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước’s parents have strict views on what constitutes learning and want her to study only maths and sciences to become a doctor. She is aghast when she hears that they plan to attend a parent/teacher evening to insist she give up art because, ‘It wastes so much of your time.’ (p 120) How much does this sort of attitude drive students to study subjects they aren’t suited for, or don’t care for?

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước won her scholarship because she was honest in her interview, whereas Jessica tried to impress with her answers. How easy is it for students to be ‘honest’ in the responses they give, when the assessment system is so contrived?

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*Discussion Point:* When Vân Ước's class are expected to engage in Creativity, Action, Service (CAS), she is sarcastic about it, given their demanding study schedules, but ironically she is already heavily committed to the English tutoring centre where she learned to read better herself. Is she already a community minded person? What evidence is there of that?

*Discussion Point:* 'What did it matter if your crew rowed one fraction of a second faster or slower than another school's crew?' (p 34) Discuss the pressure on elite sportspeople at schools to excel at all costs. (Billy's extreme regime to maintain his rowing prowess is a case in point.)

*Discussion Point:* Ironically, Vân Ước discovers (p 116) that Billy's parents expect him to be a doctor just as hers do. But the reasons couldn't be more different. He is to be a fourth generation doctor; she is to prove to her parents with her success that all their hard work and sacrifices have been worth it. Are parental expectations a help or a hindrance in achievement or self-actualisation?

## • **Friendship and Peer Group Pressure** (LY/R/PSC & EB)

'The room didn't feel like hers in any way. It was a distillation of the exclusion she expected to feel, a concentration of the in-ness of various friendship groups. Worse than walking out into the playground glare of unpopularity, here you had to walk through a doorway.' (p 75)

*Question:* Friendships in this (and the previous novels) offer great strength to the characters but can also be fraught with tensions and dangers, and often forged in shallow ground. Holly has her 'acolytes', but beware anyone who challenges her power! Jess and Vân Ước have a 'tiff' over her burgeoning relationship with Billy but eventually work out their differences. Vân Ước discovers that new friends, Lou, Michael and Sibylla, are prepared to back her, which gives her more confidence. Billy has to work out that even his friends in the rowing team, such as Ben Capaldi, can't determine what he wants out of life. How would you define a friend? How easy is it to make friends, and keep them?

*Discussion Point:* In the previous book, Sibylla fell out with her former best friend Holly. In this one, Sibylla seems determined to protect Vân Ước from Billy, as do Michael and, initially, Jessica. Are they all protecting her for the same reasons?

## • **Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Racism** (LY/ R & L & W & S1/IU & AAEA & EB)

'How dare this government describe asylum seekers who arrived by boat as 'illegals', deliberately misinforming the electorate?' (p 8)

*Activity:* Read Vân Ước's short essay on this topic (p 8). Write your own piece outlining your feelings on this issue.

*Activity:* Racist stereotypes about Asians are listed (pp 30–31) by Vân Ước. Discuss in class. Then add to the list any other preconceived notions that you've observed among your peers.

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*Activity:* Vân Ước's parents have had to take on long hours in unsavoury work in order to support their family in Australia: her mother has worked as a 'piece worker'; her father cutting up pieces of chicken in a factory. Research what employment is commonly available to people when they arrive in Australia as temporary residents seeking permanent status.

*Discussion Point:* 'They got the diagnosis last year: relapsing post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. This year it was getting treated properly.' (p 39) Discuss the impact such horrendous journeys must have had, and continue to have, on refugees.

*Discussion Point:* Children of refugees often inherit a better life but also the guilt of what their parents have endured: 'you shared the weight of all the risks they'd taken (for you); all the suffering they'd gone through ...' (pp 39–40) Vân Ước was born in Australia but bears the weight of her parents' struggle. How does this impact on Vân Ước's life?

*Discussion Point:* Read the conversation between Vân Ước and her father about the term 'economic refugees' (p 121). This sort of terminology is often used to defend arguments against taking in refugees. Discuss the use of such heavily biased language in the refugee debate. Discuss how terms such as 'Queue jumpers', 'boat people' and other derogatory terms have fuelled racist attitudes and been used by governments as propaganda in recent years.

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước's mother says: 'It was like having to choose between our parents and our children.' (p 199) Discuss the tragic implications of this statement.

*Discussion Point:* Read and discuss these quotes: 'Do you think they get the irony that the more we do what they want, the less we can connect with them?' (p 102) or 'Her mother was right. The two of them represented an irreconcilable cultural split. Distance between them was inevitable.' (p 226)

*Activity:* Read Vân Ước's mother's story (pp 243–7) and discuss her feelings and actions. Research and compare this to other firsthand accounts of Vietnamese people's journeys, and to that of more recent asylum seekers.

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước remembers a boy and a woman standing in the mirror behind her as a child (p 119). Were these ghosts of her parents' past?

*Activity:* The tutoring program where Vân Ước volunteers is crucial to some refugees in learning English and how to cope in this new society. (Fiona Wood draws on her own experience as a volunteer in the Friday Night School Program in Melbourne.) Discover such programs in your own community, and encourage engagement by students.

- **Sex and Love** (LY/R/PSC)

'If she had to be in unrequited love with someone, which seemed annoyingly to be the case, surely logic should have pointed her in the direction of Michael. Kind, brainy, handsome, and his own endearing brand of very odd. Because he himself was in unrequited love with Sibylla Quinn. Michael would be a perfect unavailable person with whom to be in unrequited love.'

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It was mystifying and annoying being attracted to Billy.’ (p 32)

*Discussion Point:* Billy tells Vân Ước that the origin of his feelings was when he realised that ‘you were the most interesting person in the room.’ (p 126) Is the definition of real attraction, as opposed to fake or childish infatuation, when you love someone for how individual they are, not for how they represent a general ideal?

*Discussion Point:* Jess knows she’s a lesbian but hasn’t ‘come out’ to her parents, as yet. She is impressed that Lou’s parents are lesbian, and she and Vân Ước look up to Penny Wong, a lesbian Labor politician, and hope she’ll become Prime Minister, one day. Given the struggles which Vân Ước faces at home and at school, how difficult would it be for Jess to reveal her sexuality?

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước’s doubts about Billy’s sincerity stem from her experiences of the emotional maelstrom of school life. Every move is analysed, dissected and critics haunt your every action. How difficult is it to form a relationship in the glare of public opinion at a school?

*Activity:* This novel is (like *Jane Eyre*) a ‘romance’ in which seemingly unsuited lovers from both sides of society find true love. Billy’s bad reputation and good looks camouflage his essential strengths. Vân Ước’s reservedness and insecurities camouflage her strong views and ardent beliefs. The challenge represented by the fact that they come from rich (white Caucasian) and poor (Asian) backgrounds is overcome by what they come to admire in each other, and by what they have in common. Discuss.

- **Wishes and Aspirations** (LY/ R & L & W & S1/PSC)

‘For Vân Ước, fantasies fell into two categories: nourishing or pointless.’ (p 1)

*Discussion Point:* Wishes are a major theme in this novel. Discuss.

*Discussion Point:* Magical wishes are the stuff of fairytales, many of which involve wishes (e.g. *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*) and also act as metaphor in this novel. Vân Ước is troubled that Billy’s interest in her is the product of a fairytale wish made on a vial found in a creative writing prompt-box. She spends the rest of the novel worrying about the ethics of the wish and how to test its legitimacy. Are wishes dangerous?

*Activity:* Brainstorm and discuss some proverbs about wishes (for example, ‘If wishes were fishes we’d all cast nets’; ‘Be careful what you wish for, lest it come true’; ‘Wishes won’t wash dishes’; ‘Great souls have wills; feeble ones have only wishes’) in relation to this novel.

*Discussion Point:* Magic is an element of wish-making and when Vân Ước discovers love she thinks: ‘This was real-world magic – a spell insistently weaving them together.’ (p 178) She even finds magic in her beloved *Jane Eyre* (pp 205–6). Can magic really be a part of everyday life?

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*Discussion Point:* Many fairytale heroines make wishes that change their lives. Vân Ước finds herself in situations which she compares to Cinderella: ‘She was spending a night in reverse-Cinderella land.’ (p 151) or ‘She was going home in an unapologetic pumpkin.’ (p 161) or ‘She felt the tangle of sex and longing and fairy-tales with handsome boys and happy endings. She was peering into the well, ready to tumble in, and what then? These stories with enchantments and wishes weren’t her stories. She was smarter than that. She was nobody’s Cinderella. She wasn’t going to fall for this *we’ve known each other forever, was she?*’ (p 187) How does the trope of Cinderella relate to Vân Ước’s story? [See also **Style and Use of Language. 6. Literary References** below.]

- **Art** (LY/ R/PSC & CCT)

‘She wanted the work to show that the seemingly insignificant could warrant close attention, and the tiniest elements could be made monumental.’ (p 37)

*Activity:* Read Vân Ước’s articulation of her art project (pp 36–8). Discuss the concepts outlined.

*Discussion Point:* ‘Belonging where we stand. Knowing that where we stand is home.’ (p 264) Vân Ước finally understands what her art project is about. It’s about her personal connections to these ordinary objects in her local area. What relationship does her love of art have to the themes in this novel?

- **Body Image, Advertising, Fashion and Gender** (LY/ R & L & S1/PSC)

‘Casual clothes day was a competitive fashion parade, for girls anyway.’ (p 51)

*Discussion point:* ‘And that prime real estate is overwhelmingly dedicated to letting women know that they don’t measure up.’ (p 63) Discuss this and some of the information (pp 62–4) about women and gender raised in Dr Fraser’s class.

*Activity:* Vân Ước’s tirade here makes several points: ‘*get your freaking photo-shopped sexist Anglo-normative ideas about beauty out of my face.*’ (p 68) Analyse each of them in relation to what you see in the media.

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước has finally had enough when local boys make disparaging sexist remarks about her, and delivers a furious speech (pp 241–2). Such behaviour, too, is learned from the media; from ‘rap’ culture attitudes to women; for these boys (as Vân Ước says) have known her since she was in primary school. Discuss how these young men behave and whether this relates to what you see in your classroom?

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- **Social and Economic Inequity** (LY/R/PSC & CCT & EB)

‘Won’t you just be another dull doctor who briefly went out with a povvo Asian girl at school to piss off his parents?’ (p 166)

*Discussion Point:* Vân Ước’s parents don’t have any money to spare so she has learned to do without a lot of the things others take for granted. Read her ‘free writing whinge’ about this (pp 48–50). Apply this to your own, or to a friend’s circumstances. How sensitive are schools to this sort of poverty?

*Activity:* Vân Ước recognises the basic inequities in her society. ‘It was a class thing. Which also meant a money thing. And they were both related to the refugee thing.’ (p 164) Examine your own school or community. What evidences of such prejudices do you find there?

*Discussion Point:* Michael recognises that if Vân Ước is charged with the prank the penalties for her (as a scholarship student) may be far worse than for others, so he admits to being Billy’s accomplice. Billy is only threatened, but not punished. This points to another form of inequity in the school system; not everyone is treated equally.

*Discussion Point:* Vân describes her reservations about the upmarket cafe which Billy visits before school (p 181). Are her feelings justified? Are the restaurants we frequent indicators of affluence or lack of it? Are such places pretentious and intimidating to those, like Vân Ước, who struggle to make ends meet?

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## Plot & Structure (LA & LT & LY/R & W & S1 /CCT)

1. **The novel is structured chronologically as a sequential narrative of events from Vân Ước's present tense point of view with some flashbacks to memories (e.g. her parents') also included.**

*Discussion Point:* How might the novel have been structured differently?

2. **The plot of a novel is generally in five parts:**

1. **Exposition** (introduction of the main characters and setting)
2. **Rising Action** (one or more characters in crisis)
3. **Climax** (turning point)
4. **Falling Action** (resolution of characters' crisis)
5. **Denouement** (resolution).

**This novel works as a series of narrative arcs, with small climaxes and then a major turning point** with Vân Ước's decision to 'test' the wish.

*Activity:* What are the other key turning points in Vân Ước's story? Draw a narrative map or chart showing the key points at which the narrative rises, falls, and then rises again to this turning point.

3. **This sort of pattern can also be found in individual scenes in the novel.**

*Activity:* Analyse the party scene at Billy's house (chapter 29) and trace this five-part structure within it.

4. **Pacing, Tension and Suspense** are integral to a novel's structure. Each chapter begins with a tempting statement or 'hook', for example, 'Every year, around this time, for as long as Vân Ước could remember, her mother got sick.' (p 39) Each ends with a cliffhanger, for example, chapter 18 ends: 'The case against him just got stronger.' (p 100)

*Activity:* Consider the ways in which the pacing is determined by these structural exclamation points.

5. The **events** which make up the **plot** of a novel are designed by the writer to investigate characters and themes.

*Discussion Point:* What are the key events in terms of the theme of testing oneself and making wishes? What are the key events which reveal the nature of each major character?

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## Characters (LA & LT & LY/R & W & L & S1 /CCT)

1. Action in this novel revolves around several central characters and several minor ones.

*Activity:* Discuss the following quotations in relation to each of the major characters.

CENTRAL CHARACTERS	QUOTATION
<b>Vân Ước (Cloudwish) Phan</b>	'It's the <i>Vân Ước</i> is giving nothing away face.' (p 109)
<b>Phan parents</b>	'So, frustrating though her gentle parents were, demanding though they were, dependent though they were, they were also her heroes in every sense, and she would rather die than disappoint them. Even if it killed her.' (p 44)
<b>Jessica</b>	'She wasn't lying when she said she was happier to stay where she was at Collingwood Girls Secondary College.' (p 13)
<b>Billy Gardiner</b>	'She examined one of the small proofs that Billy Gardiner had a (well hidden) heart.' (p 23)  'they accepted the alpha presence doing what he did best: getting his way. Leading.' (p 134)
<b>Lou</b>	'She had her own rung. She stood up for weaker animals. She had a moral platform.' (p 17)
<b>Michael Cassidy</b>	'He wasn't a natural fit at school, but he put up with everything stoically or, where possible, taking the absent-minded path of least resistance, not interested in exercising teenage rebellion, exerting his preference not to take part in certain activities in ways that were acceptable to the school.' (p 231)
<b>Holly Broderick</b>	'You have a very ugly sense of humour.' (p 230)

*Activity:* Discuss any of the characters below and write a short description of them.

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## Minor Characters:

*Gardiner Parents:*

*Local Boys:* Nick Sparrow, Matthew Tran;

*School Students:* Annie, Tiff, Ava, Pippa, Polly, Vincent, Ben Capaldi;

*School Staff:* Ms Joanne King, coordinates CAS; Mr (Pigman) Hodge; Ms Halabi, art teacher; Dr Lucy Fraser, teacher of Theory of Knowledge (TOK); Ms Norton, English teacher; Dr Dryden, Principal;

*Homework School Tutor Program:* Debi, Eleanor.

*Activity:* Select a quotation which accurately describes any of the characters above.

*Discussion Point:* Are there any 'minor' characters you would like to have seen feature more in the action? Might one character figure more prominently in a sequel?

*Discussion Point:* Some characters are intended to invoke sympathy in the reader, and others not to. Which characters do you have sympathy for and why? Which ones are unattractive, annoying, or puzzling?

2. **Characters are often described in terms which relate them metaphorically to someone or something else.** For example, 'It reminded her of the moment just before the Incredible Hulk starting Hulking.' (p 33)

*Activity:* Write a description of Vân Ước using metaphorical language such as this.

3. **The detail used to create a character often includes aspects of their setting which 'echo' their characteristics.**

*Activity:* Find an example of this in the novel.

4. **Dialogue** can also add to the characterisation established by description.

*Discussion Point:* Discuss the dialogue between Billy and Vân Ước (pp 114–6) when they meet to do homework together. What does it reveal about each of them?

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## Style and Use of Language

(LA & LT & LY/R & W & L & S1 /CCT)

1. The **narrative voice is third person subjective, present tense, from Vân Ước's point of view.** It also includes some memories of the past (such as her parents' arrival in Australia and Vân Ước's childhood) and also first-person writing by Vân Ước in which she expresses her feelings.

*Activity:* How different are Vân Ước's writings to the third-person narrative? Choose a section in the narrative and write it in first person. How does this change the narrative?

2. **Writing about another culture** presented a challenge to Fiona Wood – in writing a Vietnamese character and using appropriate language in this novel. One strategy was to write in third person, rather than first, in order to maintain a respectful distance from that character. Other strategies she used to address these challenges are well-explained in this interview:

'Author Interview: Fiona Wood on *Cloudwish*' *Kids Book Review* 23 November, 2015  
[www.kids-bookreview.com/2015/11/author-interview-fiona-wood-on-cloudwish.html](http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2015/11/author-interview-fiona-wood-on-cloudwish.html)

*Discussion Point:* How challenging is it to write about another culture or from an alien point of view?

3. **Voice is created by a range of devices including syntax, word-choice, literary devices such as metaphor and simile.** For example, 'She only unfolded that ugly little garment – still full of missing stitches – in private, trying to understand exactly what her parents might have survived.' (p 43) is suggestively metaphorical of the secrets in Vân Ước's family.

*Activity:* Choose and discuss some quotes from the novel. Speak with students about the need to use language which is uniquely phrased, and informed by original insights.

4. This novel falls into the **genres of issues-based realistic novel, romantic comedy, rite of passage novel and school story.**

*Activity:* Discuss the links between the tropes of the traditional school story and this novel.

*Activity:* Read and compare this novel to other examples of the 'rite of passage' novel. [See **Further Reading** below.]

*Discussion Point:* As a romantic comedy, how well would *Cloudwish* translate to a movie? *Clueless* is mentioned at one point in the novel. What other teenage 'rom-coms' might you compare it to?

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5. **Humour** is a device used in each of Fiona Wood's novels. She employs it to deal with her characters' feelings and with the issues which concern them, in an oblique way.

*Activity:* What examples of humour did you notice in this book?

6. **Literary references** are used throughout this novel as a frame of reference. Students might be encouraged to analyse and discuss any one of the following references and to engage in related writing tasks.

*Activity:* Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* acts as a sort of guide to Vân Ước's life. 'She could virtually hear Jane tsk tsk-ing in annoyance.' (p 40) Trace the several references to *Jane Eyre*, and how they relate to the action and themes in this novel. Read her reasons for liking the novel so much (p 211).

*Activity:* Her class studies *Ariel*, a collection by Sylvia Plath. 'Did Sylvia Plath have this sort of problem? Was Ted Hughes suddenly everywhere she went, so she felt like she was tripping over him?' (p 56) Read 'Mad Girl's Love Song'.

[www.allpoetry.com/Mad-Girl's-Love-Song](http://www.allpoetry.com/Mad-Girl's-Love-Song) referred to by Vân Ước (p 168). Why does she love this poet so much?

*Activity:* Other references include: 'could never quite glean her teeming brain, to borrow from John Keats' (p 38) and 'She had not fallen down a rabbit hole.' (p 53) The visiting writer, Ronette Bartloch's name is an anagram of Charlotte Bronte – purveyor of magic via story/creative writing. Discuss any one of these references and how they relate to the novel thematically.

*Discussion Point:* This novel is also peppered with media references; for example, Vân Ước recalls the sequence from *American Beauty* where 'the boy next door filmed the plastic bag blowing around in the wind. A mundane object imbued with a balletic beauty.' (p 96) This relates to Vân Ước's art project and to a major theme in the novel of looking beneath the surface of things to find their true essence. 'Mindy and Mork' (p 127) is also referred to. What other media references did you notice particularly?

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## Setting (LA & LT & LY/R & W & L & S1 /CCT)

1. **A vivid and convincing setting depends on description which makes it visually come alive for the reader.**

*Activity:* Choose a passage which really makes the place seem real to you.

2. **Setting can also be enhanced by contrasting one location to another.**

*Activity:* This novel is set largely at Crowthorne Grammar, but also includes various other locations. When Vân Ước visits Billy's lavish home she immediately describes it in her mind in contrast to what her housing commission flats are like (pp 110–1). Write a similar description of two places in sharp contrast to each other.

3. **Description should also be informed by all the senses – sounds, tastes, smell as well as vision.** Note, for example, in the contrasting descriptions above, that sight, sound and smell are also evoked.

*Activity:* 'The mild air smelled like autumn and damp and tanbark with the background whiff of hundreds of kitchen exhaust fans.' (p 210) What does this tell you about where Vân Ước lives? Write a revised version of the piece you wrote above using all your senses.

4. **Place is evoked by beautiful and detailed description, employing a range of literary devices.**

*Activity:* 'At close range the river was coffee-coloured, a silt-based river, though from a distance it reflected the myriad skies under which it stretched.' (p 138) Analyse how this passage works to create a sense of the place. Find and discuss other passages like this one.

5. **Descriptions evoke different images in the mind of the reader.**

*Activity:* Draw or paint Vân Ước's bedroom based on how it is described in the novel. Compare your various images with the class.

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## Writing Exercises (LA & LT & LY/R & W /CCT)

1. **Vân Ước begins the novel sceptical about the ‘fantasy-prompt box’ but finds that writing her feelings down has a beneficial effect.** Create a fantasy-prompt box like the one which Ms Bartloch presents to Vân’s class in Chapter 1. Encourage students to imagine things as they might be in association with the object they each draw from the box and then to relate that to their own lives.
2. **Diary Writing** can act as another form of therapy. Invite students to mimic Vân Ước’s ‘select all/delete’ stream of consciousness style of writing in the story by writing a similar passage themselves, about an issue raised in this novel which also has relevance in their own lives.
3. **Packaging of a book includes the blurb and cover** which must offer the reader an insight into the contents, and the emotional impact of a novel without giving the ending away; and market the book to its readers. Examine the cover of this book, assessing how the words and images interact and are descriptive of the novel after you’ve read it. Design your own cover. Read the back cover blurb, and then write your own.
4. **Write an argument for the affirmative or negative:** ‘Many popular religions teach us that we are all equal.’ (p 203) Then conduct a debate on the subject.
5. **Write the lyrics for a song detailing Vân Ước’s feelings for Billy Gardiner.** Use the folk ballad form (à la singers such as Courtney Barnett or Paul Kelly).

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## Quotes for Discussion after Reading the Novel

(LA & LT & LY/R & W & L & S1 /CCT)

1. Vân Ước writes a response to a quote by Picasso: '*Art is a lie that tells the truth*' (p 96). Discuss in relation to her art project in this novel, and also to *Cloudwish* as a 'work of art' itself. Discuss the following quote about art as well: '*The object of art is to give life a shape ... Jean Anouilh*' (p 98).
2. Discuss the Vietnamese proverb quotations on page 97.
3. 'Make *him* feel better?' (p 251) Vân Ước compares Billy's relatively minor problems to those of many living in war-torn countries (pp 251–2), or those forced to flee from them, like her parents. Are the wishes and desires of our relatively affluent country, largely trivial?
4. Billy has 'The kind of smart that bugged teachers.' (p 24) What kind of 'smart' bugs your teachers?
5. Discuss this quote: 'These kids were always being stroked and caressed with soft words and extravagant praise, so different from her own mother's don't waste time, study hard, practise more – spoken at times perfunctorily, at other times sharply, like a slap or a bite.' (p 139)

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## Further Reading Ideas for Class Discussion

(LA & LT & LY/R & S1 /CCT)

1. Read and discuss the passage (pp 26–27) where Debi shows Vân Ước how to understand a text (*Jane Eyre*) through close reading of the text and its context. Apply this technique to reading *Cloudwish*.
2. Where might Vân Ước, Billy and Jessica be in five years time, from the hints in this novel? Write your predictions for each of them.
3. Re-read the novel after having considered its themes and style; notice, on this second reading, the hidden references to many of the themes which develop as the novel progresses. For example, the opening paragraph contains a description of the view from Vân Ước's bedroom window: 'every night it turned the city into an electric fairyland. Once upon a long time ago she believed in magic.' (p 1)
4. Re-read Fiona Wood's two preceding novels and trace the links between them.
5. In this series of novels, Fiona Wood has shown the reader that every character has a story; in *Wildlife* Lou is the focus, in this one, Vân Ước is the protagonist. Major characters from previous novels assume minor roles here, which is deliberately unsettling. Viewing the world from different perspectives demonstrates to the reader that every situation can be seen differently. Which characters mentioned might have a 'back story' which could become a sequel? (e.g. Vincent, Jessica, Matthew Tran.) Are there questions unanswered in this novel? What are they? Might they possibly lead to another sequel? Discuss.

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## Further Ideas Using Technology

(LA & LT & LY/R & W & L & S1 /ICTC)

1. Research the author and her writing of this work. Read for example,  
  
'Author Interview: Fiona Wood on *Cloudwish*' Kids Book Review 23 November, 2015  
[www.kids-bookreview.com/2015/11/author-interview-fiona-wood-on-cloudwish.html](http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2015/11/author-interview-fiona-wood-on-cloudwish.html)  
  
Karen Hardy 'Fiona Wood Interview: Author of *Cloudwish* Keeps it Real for Teens'  
*The Sydney Morning Herald* September 26, 2015  
[www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/fiona-wood-interview-author-of-cloudwish-keeps-it-real-for-teens-20150917-gjo7xy.html](http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/fiona-wood-interview-author-of-cloudwish-keeps-it-real-for-teens-20150917-gjo7xy.html)  
  
'Interview with Fiona Wood, author of *Cloudwish*'  
[www.alphareader.blogspot.com.au/2015/09/interview-with-fiona-wood-author-of.html](http://www.alphareader.blogspot.com.au/2015/09/interview-with-fiona-wood-author-of.html)  
  
'An Interview with Fiona Wood'  
[www.yamidnightreads.com/2015/08/interview-with-fiona-wood-author-of-cloudwish/](http://www.yamidnightreads.com/2015/08/interview-with-fiona-wood-author-of-cloudwish/)  
  
'An author talks about tutoring a Vietnamese-Australian'  
[www.news.com.au/lifestyle/sunday-style/opinion/an-author-talks-about-tutoring-a-vietnameseaustrian/news-story/0fe781e7aab03f0e328d10cbca687998](http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/sunday-style/opinion/an-author-talks-about-tutoring-a-vietnameseaustrian/news-story/0fe781e7aab03f0e328d10cbca687998)
2. Several reviewers online have written about the novel. Read some of these reviews, then have the class write their own.
3. Listen and compare the two versions of the song played by the year eleven band Miro which Vân Ước describes (pp 131–2): 'Vance Joy Riptide (Official Video)'  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ\\_1HMAGb4k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ_1HMAGb4k) ?  
and Vance Joy Riptide (Live)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7RxFadHu6M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7RxFadHu6M)  
Why does she prefer the live one? Which do you prefer and why?
4. Create a Book Trailer about this novel.
5. Design a poster on screen to advertise this book. Use a simple computer drawing program to create your design.

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## Conclusion

*Cloudwish* is a touchingly funny and yet serious novel about issues such as cultural dislocation, depression, first love, coping with stresses at school, finding out who you are, and being true to yourself. It is a magical rite of passage, a romantic comedy, and a heart-warming novel about fitting in.

## Author Note

**Fiona Wood's** first YA novel *Six Impossible Things* was shortlisted for the 2011 CBCA Book of the Year, Older Readers. Her second, *Wildlife* won the 2014 CBCA Book of the Year Older Readers award and was shortlisted for several other awards. Her books are published internationally. Before writing YA fiction, Fiona wrote television scripts. *Cloudwish* is her third novel and it has won the 2015 Indie Book Awards for young adult fiction. She lives in Melbourne with her family. Visit her website for more information: [www.fionawood.com](http://www.fionawood.com)

## Further Reading

Buzo, Laura *Good Oil*, Allen & Unwin, 2010.

Clarke, Judith *Night Train*, Penguin, 1998.

Condon, Bill *Confessions of a Liar, Thief and Failed Sex God*, Random House, 2009.

Crowley, Cath *Graffiti Moon*, Pan Macmillan, 2010.

Earls, Nick, *After January*, UQP, 1994.

Horniman, Joanne *About a Girl*, Allen & Unwin, 2010.

Lee, Harper *To Kill a Mockingbird*, HarperCollins, 1960.

Marchetta, Melina *Looking for Alibrandi*, Puffin, 1992.

Metzenthen, David *Jarvis 24*, Penguin, 2009.

Salinger, JD *Catcher in the Rye*, Little Brown and Co., 1951.

Wood, Fiona *Six Impossible Things*, Pan Macmillan, 2010.

Wood, Fiona *Wildlife*, Pan Macmillan, 2013.