

MARGARET CLARK

WRITING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE: NOTES TO MYSELF

Think about the ways I gain information from young people to craft my books. Early in my career, listening, overhearing, letters, questions and feedback from readers during school visits and festival talks. Later, the thousands of emails sent to me by young people.

Then think about all the other influences that have shaped my work:
myself as a child
myself as a teacher and educator
myself as a mother and now a grandmother,
myself as a counsellor
myself as an email correspondent.

Childhood experiences and values change over time, as do certain idioms within language. So is the information I get today different from the information young people gave me then? How have things changed? What are my responsibilities as a writer for young people? Do I have any responsibilities?

Read several emails from new book *Secret Friends' Stuff* concerning young people and their problems.

Dear Margaret,
I am scared I will get a disease and die. I worry about this all the time.
People die from Mangy Cockles. How can I stay safe?

Page 64 read and discuss from point of view of my own teen years. Ditto page 154/155

Read aloud from *Friends Forever - A Secret Diary by Sara Swan*. I wanted to focus on moving house and the shifting of friendships.

Page 212 of *Fat Chance* illustrates my own childhood and that of my daughter Fiona when she was age 15 – the insecurities and issues of peer pressure that were important then. Have these changed?

Writing *with* young people, yes. The secret to being on the same wavelength is accurate recall of my own childhood and teenage years. Details might have changed, but the concerns remain.

WRITING FOR YOUNG READERS vs WRITING FOR ADULTS:
NOTES TO MYSELF

**When I write for
children and teenagers:**

- * I feel I can be creative and imaginative
- * I'm not as judgemental – nor are the readers
- * often write one draft, maybe two
- * feel no tension or pressure
- * established market (schools)
- * kids think I'm smart
- * very little forward planning

Writing for Adults:

- * Feel I can't be as imaginative
- * I feel adults are more critical
- * nine drafts, nine editors
- * I do feel a certain tension. Why?
- * unsure market
- * adults may think I'm not smart
- * more planning than ever

Copyright © Margaret Clark 2006