



RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary students (ages 13+; years 7 to 10)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Story forms: Fantasy/Dystopian
- How an author constructs voice and character
- Language: simile and metaphor, description, analogy
- Building vocabulary
- Structure
- Values: fortitude, trust, bravery, friendship, heroism, leadership, resilience, morality

PREPARED BY

Zoe Walton and Skye Melki-Wegner

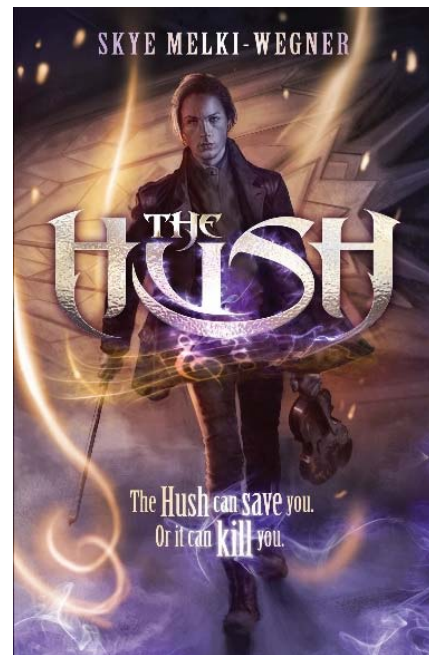
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The Hush

Skye Melki-Wegner

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The Hush begins with a dramatic prologue: Chester Hays has his head on the chopping block, and the axe is about to fall. His crime? He has been found guilty of connecting to the Song without a licence.

Stopping at the exact moment the axe begins to fall, the story then goes back in time so that the reader learns how Chester came to be in this predicament. A young man of around seventeen years, he has spent the last few months on the road, visiting town after town, searching for clues about his father, who disappeared from his bed without a trace. Chester's only companion is his fiddle, which he plays in exchange for food and a bed.

Arriving in the town of Hamelin, everything seems fine – until that evening, while he is performing. Chester asks for requests from the crowd, and a serious young man who has been watching him challenges Chester to play 'The Nightfall Duet'. 'The Nightfall Duet' is nearly impossible to play, and has been recently renamed in honour of the Nightfall Gang, who are notorious in Meloral for their brazen, impossible thefts. Chester plays the piece, but becomes so involved in the music that he accidentally connects to the Song, the music that underlies the world.

In Meloral, such an action is unthinkable, and punishable by death. Only the very wealthy can afford to send their children to the Conservatorium, and the Conservatorium is the only place where students can learn to become a Songshaper – to create Music (with a capital ‘M’), and to connect to the Song. Songshapers can imbue objects with magical power created by Music. Sorcery lamps, for instance, are activated by the melody of a nursery rhyme.

The wealthy and powerful – the Songshapers themselves as well as the sugar barons and other wealthy families – keep the country under tight control, and they live in opulent luxury while treating the working class like their slaves. Apart from their daring thefts, another reason for the notoriety of the Nightfall Gang is that they work against this system, giving their proceeds to those who need it.

Switching perspective while Chester sits in prison awaiting his fate, we are introduced to Susannah – at the very second she is dangling from a windowsill, with guards above her searching for her, and the ground a long way below. Susannah is the captain of the Nightfall Gang, and one of their raids hasn’t gone to plan.

The only way for Susannah to escape is for her to disappear into the Hush. And here, finally, the reader learns what the title of the book refers to – the Hush is a secret parallel world that you can slip into if you know the right Musical password. But the Hush is dangerous – the Hush is where the magical residue from the real world goes. It swirls with an unnatural rain that leaves you dry; it is prowled by Echoes, ghostly forms who can kill you if they touch you; and nothing is as it seems.

After a nail-biting escape, Susannah is joined by her friends Dot and Travis on their echoship, a special ship that harnesses the power of Magic to move through the Hush. Susannah waits to hear from Sam, the final member of their crew. But when a female Songshaper unexpectedly follows them into the Hush and chases them, Susannah must find a way to hide their crew and their ship the *Cavatina*, or risk being caught.

Sam, meanwhile, has been sent on a mission to find the unlicensed Songshaper who has been detected in the town of Hamelin – the very person whose head is on the chopping block. He rescues Chester by pulling him into the Hush, but once again they

are chased by a Songshaper, Nathaniel Glaucon, who has the advantage of being able to ride his pegasus over the cornfields to search for them as they run.

In an epic battle of Music and magic, Nathaniel tries to kill Chester, but Sam is able to disable him for long enough for the pair to escape.

When Sam finally makes it back to the *Cavatina* with an injured Chester, Chester finds that he is the only person who can save the ship and crew from disaster. During the escape from and battle with the Songshaper, the *Cavatina* has tried to cross water – and in the Hush, water is the biggest danger of all, since its ripples and reflections create a clashing chaos of Music that will suck you in and drown you. Chester must play Music to help Dot and Travis reset the ship’s engine so they can escape.

Only once they’re safe can Susannah reveal to Chester why they need him: he is an essential part of an audacious plan to raid the Conservatorium.

Initially reluctant, Chester agrees to help when Susannah reveals that she knows what has happened to his missing father – and that, by helping with the mission, Chester stands a chance to see him again. Susannah and Sam have good reason to hate the Conservatorium and everything the Songshapers stand for – because they have been the victims of its treacherous and cruel practices. Now they’re on the run, but they’re determined to have their revenge, and to rescue the other people they know are in danger.

But first, Chester must prove his loyalty by taking part in a robbery with the Nightfall Gang – this time, to steal the documents they will need in order for Chester to audition at the Conservatorium.

There are plenty more obstacles along the way, but the plan must proceed immediately, or the gang will have to wait another year.

Can the infamous Nightfall Gang pull off the biggest break-in in history, by targeting the highest seat of magical power in the land? Will Chester pass the audition – considering that he can’t help connecting to the Song whenever he plays?

Most importantly, what is hidden at the heart of the Conservatorium, and why is it so important that Susannah and the others stop it? There is one thing Susannah hasn’t told Chester – and it is the most deadly secret of all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Skye Melki-Wegner is an Arts/Law graduate from Melbourne. She has worked as a saleswoman, an English tutor and a popcorn-wrangler (at a cinema). In her spare time, she devours a ridiculous amount of caffeine and fantasy literature. Chasing the Valley, Skye's first series, has been sold internationally. You can contact Skye at www.skyemelki-wegner.com.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Skye Melki-Wegner says:

I was inspired to write *The Hush* one day when I was teaching myself a few basic chords on a keyboard. Although I'm not a musician, I sometimes mess around with instruments and I love to listen to albums from my favourite bands. It struck me that there is something quite magical about music. A talented musician can adjust your emotions, tell a story, or change the mood of an entire room. Even a simple melody can be extremely powerful! I decided it would be fun to write about a world where music actually has magical powers.

While writing *The Hush*, I was also inspired by folklore, mythology and philosophy. I loved the idea of hiding little references for keen readers to find, so there are quite a few nods to older stories lurking throughout the book. For example, in classical mythology, 'Linus' is the inventor of rhythm and melody. 'Thrace' is sometimes said to be the home of the legendary Orpheus, who could play magical music on his lyre. The town of 'Taminor' came from 'Tamino', a character in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Several other town names allude to old stories or myths – can you spot them?

On a deeper level, I've always been fascinated by the idea of false realities and layers of deception (including self-deception). Nathaniel's surname, 'Glaucou', is a reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, which helped to inspire the climax of the novel. Perhaps this could be an area of research for more advanced students.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin was also a key source of inspiration, since the tale revolves around a man who can manipulate people with music. There are several references to this folktale scattered throughout *The Hush*, including the town of Hamelin, the city of Weser (named after the river in the folktale) and 'Rattenfanger' Bridge, which is the original German name for the Piper.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Story structure:** Why did the author choose to begin *The Hush* with a dramatic and tense scene in which the main character is about to die, then go back in time to see what happened, and what will happen?
- **Worldbuilding and setting:** List the aspects of the world of Meloral that you have learned about while reading the novel. What is similar to our world, and what is different? What techniques does the author use to make you believe in the world she has created?
- **Simile and metaphor:** The book uses music as the basis for the world's system of magic. The author extends the analogy of music and embeds it even more deeply in the novel by using musical similes and metaphors and motifs – starting on the very first page with the line 'From this angle, the world looked like a treble clef. A hill curved high on the horizon. A swirl of ink. A symbol on a song sheet.' Can you find more examples?
- **Music:** In *The Hush*, music has power and creates magic. It also creates an emotional response in characters like Sam, and those who Chester performs for. Have you experienced a time when music made you feel an emotion such as anger, happiness or sadness? Give examples and try to identify what aspects of the music made you feel that way.
- **Making comparisons:** What other films, TV shows or books have you seen or read that you could compare with *The Hush*? For example, think about the way Sam walks and dresses, and some of the small dusty towns the gang visits. Does this remind you of the 'cowboy western' genre of film and books? What other comparisons can you make to the plot or the characters?
- **The twist:** Did you see the dramatic twists coming, such as the information that is revealed in the final climactic scenes? How did the author foreshadow the twist or give clues for what was to come?
- **Character conflict:** Conflict plays a major role in fiction writing and is essential to any good story. Find examples of these different types of conflict in *The Hush*: inner conflict (within one character about their beliefs or their actions), conflict with nature or the environment, conflict between characters, and conflict with societal values.

- **Point of view:** *The Hush* is written from a third person limited point of view, alternating between Chester and Susannah. Why do you think the author made those decisions about whose perspective to write from and whether to write in first person or third person? Try writing a scene from one of the other characters' point of view, such as Dot, Travis or Sam – or even Nathaniel Glaucon.
- **Leadership:** Is Susannah a good leader? What leadership qualities does she possess? What is her style of leadership? Do the rest of the gang respect her? How do they show their respect?
- **Moral and ethical dilemmas:** What dilemmas do the characters face? Why have the Nightfall Gang chosen to steal from the rich and give to the poor (a classic trope for heroes, with the best-known example being Robin Hood)? Why do they want to break in to the Conservatorium? Do their actions have unexpected or challenging consequences that they could not have foreseen?
- **Tyranny:** What do we mean by a 'tyrannical' regime? Discuss the Songshapers' laws and their means of enforcing them. Do you think that these rules and laws can be classified as tyrannical? Why or why not?
- **Poverty and inequality:** In towns such as Linus, there is a stark difference between the lives of the rich and the poor. How does the author show this difference? Can you draw any parallels with our own world, either now or throughout history?
- **Environmentalism:** Near the end of the book, Nathaniel Glaucon speaks about the Songshapers' actions and their impact on the Hush. Can you draw any parallels with environmental issues in our own world?

chained in a cave facing a blank wall. As they can see only the shadows moving on the wall, they assume that this shadow world is the real world. Discuss this allegory and its relevance to *The Hush*. Can reality ever be subjective?

- In your discussion, you might consider Susannah's words in the epilogue: 'They're both real . . . in their own way.' Do you agree?

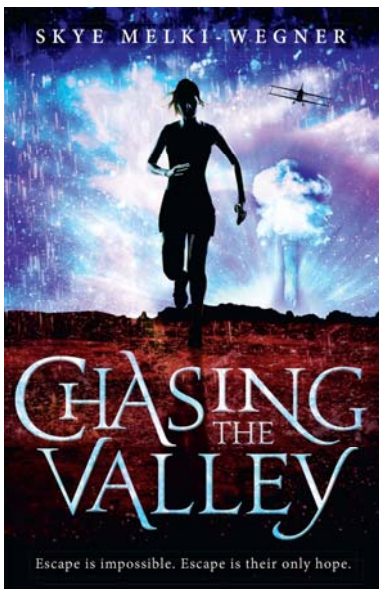
CREATIVE EXERCISES

- **A different perspective:** Imagine that you are an ordinary resident of Hamelin. You are waiting in the town square to watch Chester's execution. Do you think that he deserves his punishment? How do you feel when he escapes?
- **Creating a fictional world:** Meloral is a fictional world. Its magic, customs, laws, food and clothing set it apart from our own society. Invent your own world. What is it called? What do people eat or wear? How is it different from the world that you live in? Draw a map to show the different cities, towns and geographical features of your world.
- **A missing father:** Imagine the scene when Chester first discovers that his father has vanished from his bed. What would he think? What would he feel? Write this scene from Chester's perspective.
- **Magical music:** Imagine that you woke up today (in our own world) and discovered that playing a song – or even singing or whistling – could produce a magical effect. How would this discovery change our society? What would you do with this power and why?

ACTIVITIES FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS

- **Mythology and folklore:** *The Hush* contains many references to mythology and old folktales. For example, the town of Hamelin refers to a famous German folktale, The Pied Piper of Hamelin. Can you find any other hidden references? Why do you think that the author included them?
- **The 'real' world:** Nathaniel's surname, Glaucon, is a reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. In this allegory, a group of prisoners spend their lives

FURTHER READING FROM RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



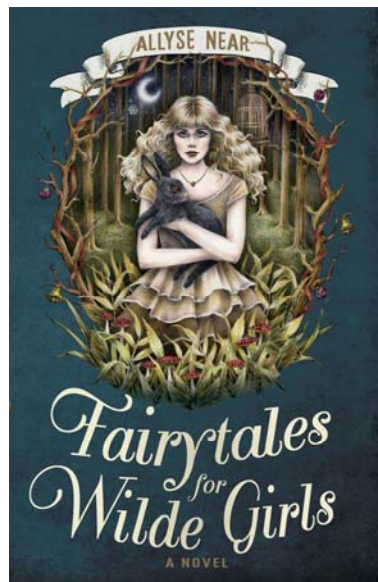
Chasing the Valley
by Skye Melki-Wegner

Why this story? The first book in an epic trilogy of magic, treachery and survival.

Danika is used to struggling for survival. But when the tyrannous king launches an attack to punish her city – echoing the alchemy bombs that killed Danika’s family – she risks her life in a daring escape over the city’s walls.

Danika joins a crew of desperate refugees who seek the Magnetic Valley, a legendary safe haven. But when she accidentally destroys a palace biplane, Danika Glynn becomes the most wanted fugitive in Taladia.

Teachers’ resources available.



Fairytale for Wilde Girls
by Allyse Near

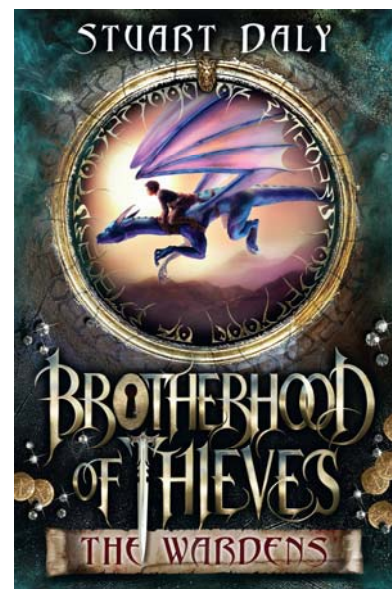
Why this story? A CBCA Honour Book and Aurealis award-winner

There’s a dead girl in a birdcage in the woods. That’s not unusual. Isola Wilde sees a lot of things other people don’t. But when the girl appears at Isola’s window, her every word a threat, Isola needs help.

Her real-life friends – Grape, James and new boy Edgar – make her forget for a while. And her brother-princes – magical creatures seemingly lifted from the pages of the French fairytales Isola idolises – will protect her with all the fierce love they possess.

It may not be enough. Isola needs to uncover the truth behind the dead girl’s demise . . . before the ghost steals Isola’s last breath.

Teachers’ resources available.



Brotherhood of Thieves 1: The Wardens
by Stuart Daly

Why this story? Another heart-racing fantasy series about what it takes to be a hero.

Caspan hates life as a thief on the streets, so he leaps at the chance to join a secret order sanctioned by the King.

The Brotherhood seeks the lost magical weapons of an ancient race that will help them fight the Roon, the invading army who creep ever closer. Defeat seems inevitable. Unless Caspan and his fellow recruits – Roland, Lachlan, Sara and Kilt – can set aside their differences and use their new skills to help turn the tide.

Teachers’ resources available.

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Hush	Skye Melki-Wegner	9780857985668	7-10	\$19.99		
Chasing the Valley	Skye Melki-Wegner	9781742759548	5-9	\$17.99		
Chasing the Valley 2: Borderlands	Skye Melki-Wegner	9781742759562	5-9	\$17.99		
Chasing the Valley 3: Skyfire	Skye Melki-Wegner	9780857981721	5-9	\$17.99		
Fairytales for Wilde Girls	Allyse Near	9781742758510	10-12	\$19.99		
Brotherhood of Thieves 1: The Wardens	Stuart Daly	9780857983275	5-9	\$17.99		
TOTAL						

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