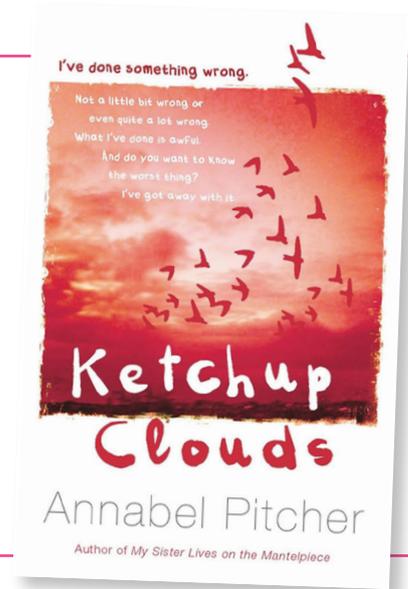


# KETCHUP CLOUDS

by Annabel Pitcher

Indigo / Orion Books  
(Middle secondary)



Zoe, 15, has a terrible secret she can't tell anyone. Then she hears of Stuart Harris locked up on death row in Texas. Like Zoe, Stuart is no stranger to secrets. Or lies. Or murder. Zoe confesses her story in the only way she can – in a series of letters to Stuart, written with a pseudonym and false address.

With the backstory of death row, *Ketchup Clouds* provides a thought-provoking platform for themes of love, loss, betrayal, guilt and redemption to be discussed, alongside the issue of the death penalty.

## BACKGROUND

Author Annabel Pitcher's friendship with a death row prisoner inspired this book. While studying at Oxford University, she saw an American nun Sister Helen Prejean speak out against the death penalty, and consequently started writing to a man on death row in Texas.

Amnesty International is an organisation that campaigns to end the death penalty. 140 countries worldwide have now abolished the death penalty in law in practice. But, in 2012, 21 countries carried out executions and at least 682 executions took place.

## SUITABILITY

This book would suit middle secondary readers as it deals with issues surrounding sex and relationships.

## CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

### Experiences and Outcomes

**LIT 402-a:** When I engage with others I can make a relevant contribution, ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute and encourage them to take account of others' points of view or alternative solutions. I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, exploring and expanding on contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking.

**RME 309-c:** I can explain how the different beliefs people have, including beliefs which are independent of religion, relate to their moral viewpoints and how this leads them to respond to moral issues.

**Drama EXA 412-a:** I can demonstrate sensitivity, precision and depth in the portrayal of a character, conveying relationships and situations in a variety of settings and to different audiences.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Zoë writes: *Criminals, who'd written back and confided all sorts. 'Like their crimes and stuff? someone asked. The nun nodded. 'Sometimes. Everyone needs to be heard.'* (page 9) In the novel Stuart's voice is never heard. Why do you think the author chose not to include responses from Stuart?
2. Zoë writes to Stuart: *Of course you made mistakes, but you faced up to your crime and accepted your fate so at least your story ends bravely. With honesty. And that is something to be proud of.* (page 253) Why does Zoë feel Stuart's story ends bravely?

## FURTHER LESSON IDEAS

### Debating:

- Students examine the treatment of prisoners across the world and in character debate the issues as member countries of the United Nations.
- Encourage students to research their own country's response to capital punishment and write speeches to persuade others.
- Give differentiated support in terms of their speech framework and research options.

### Campaign posters:

- Ask students to design posters to influence others to vote against the death penalty.

### Physical movement approaches:

- Link to discussion of our rights and the powerlessness that people face on death row.
- Use childhood games that take rights away as stimuli, explore feelings associated with actions (piggy in the middle, blind man's buff, picking for teams).

### Role Play:

- A hot seating activity. Based on the 'Jeremy Kyle' style chat show. Students debate the issue of Alice's guilt and Stuart's punishment in character. After a close reading of the text students prepare speeches using extracts from the novel. Students then question each other in role to explore their understanding of character.

## UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**Article 3:** We all have the right to life and to live in freedom and safety.

**Article 5:** Nobody has any right to hurt or torture us or treat us cruelly.

## BOOKS AND FILMS

The following selection of books and films also use the death penalty as a theme.

### Novels

*A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens (lower secondary)

*The Green Mile*, Stephen King (upper secondary)

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee (lower secondary)

*Private Peaceful*, Michael Morpurgo (lower secondary)

### Films

Please check the content is appropriate for your students.

- *Dead Man Walking*
- *The Life of David Gale*
- *Call Me Kuchu*
- *Into the Abyss: a tale of death, a tale of life*
- *The Thin Blue Line*
- *14 Days in May*

## FIND OUT MORE

Amnesty International has developed a range of educational resources to support teachers exploring this topic: Lesson 7 of *Everyone Everywhere* is a useful introduction and *A Matter of Life and Death* resource pack comes with lessons, films, worksheets and an Assembly.

Order for free at [www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)

Further resources for teaching around human rights can be found at: [www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)