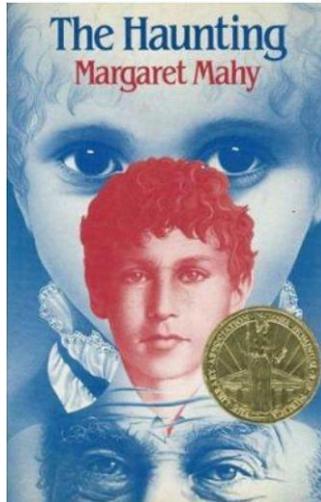


PUKAPUKA TĀWHIRI

The Haunting by Margaret Mahy

Published 1982



Pukapuka Tāwhiri refers to books that keep calling us back – books that we’ve connected with in the past and continue to emotionally resonate with us. What is it about these books that stick in our heads? Whether the fires of interest are stoked through connections with characters, through particularly vivid imagery, or through exciting themes of magic or mysticism, once burning they can energize us for a future of reading for pleasure. A lifetime of reading is a lifetime of placing ourselves in others’ shoes and a lifetime of learning about people whose lives are different to us. These emotional connections developed through reading occur at a neurological level, but the effects span to a societal one, as they teach us how to develop empathy and understand others.

When reading, think about how this book ignites your interest, or doesn’t. Why does it continue to sit on Aotearoa’s bookshelf decades after it was first published? This book will spark joy in the ghost, witch, and supernatural-obsessed. It’s engaging, as the reader is drawn into the richly described world and the suspense creeps up throughout the story until the final twist in the tale. Packaged inside *The Haunting* are themes of **the past**, and its consequences, **familial love** and **familial strife**, **fear**, and **loss and guilt**.

Before Reading:

With supernatural content that includes an ensemble of supposed-ghosts, magicians, hauntings, and tricks this a creepy tale that, although benign, may scare young readers. Contains repeated allusions to death, including that of the protagonist’s mother who died in childbirth.

During or after reading:

Themes in *The Haunting*:

Family

- The Palmer family is very close and the love between the siblings, Barney, Tabitha, and Troy, and their stepmother, Claire, is apparent. Barney's mother died in childbirth with him and, as the book progresses, we meet and find more out about his mother's family, the Scholars.
- The Scholar family is, conversely, fractured. It was ruled by Barney's great-grandmother who was nasty and quite cruel to Barney's great-uncle Cole before he disappeared as a child.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. What were the differences in the way the Palmer family treated each other and the way the Scholar family treated each other?
2. How do you think the stepmother Claire felt about Barney? How did the way great-grandmother Scholar treat great-uncle Cole make you feel?
3. How did the treatment from his mother affect Cole?
4. Families sometimes argue. How was the familial conflict resolved in the end of the book?

The Past and its secrets

- The past is haunting Barney, but not in the way he thinks. The impact of great-uncle Cole's mistreatment by his mother is affecting the younger generations, as Cole seeks to take Barney away with him.
- We find out that the Scholar family is a line of magicians who, according to great-grandmother Scholar, are always boys. At the end of the book we find out this was untrue.
- Barney refuses to tell his stepmother about what is happening to him and only confides in his sister Tabitha.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. Why did great-grandmother Scholar lie about only boys becoming magicians? Why did she treat her magical son the way she did?
2. Why did Cole want to take Barney away? Do you think this is fair?

3. Why didn't Barney want to tell his stepmother about what was happening to him?
4. How do things in the past continue to affect the present? Is learning about the past important? Why/why not?

Fear and Loss

- What is happening to Barney is scaring him – it starts to affect him and the way he looks, as his sister remarks he looks pale and like a ghost himself.
- Barney loses his mother in childbirth and, with his stepmother now pregnant, he fears he will lose her too.
- The plot of the book is precipitated by the death of Barney's namesake, great-uncle Barnaby. It has a creepy, eerie atmosphere, with Barney fearing he is being haunted by his great-uncle Cole's ghost. After we find out Cole is alive, we learn he is coming to forcibly take Barney away.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. Did you find the book scary? Were there any lines or passages that stood out to you or that you found creepy?
2. What did Barney do when he was afraid? Did he tell anyone about what was happening to him?
3. Was Barney still afraid of great-uncle Cole at the end of the book? Why/why not?
4. Could you relate to Barney's fear? Do you have fears, or fears you have overcome?

Magic

- We find out about the line of Scholar magicians, such as great-uncle Cole, and the magic they are capable of.
- At the end of the book, we find out Tabitha is a Magician, and the source of the magic that was drawing in great-uncle Cole.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. What are some of the different attitudes toward magic in the book, such as great-grandmother Scholar?
2. Some saw magic as a curse? Why is this?
3. What do you think of the way magic was used in the book? Was it fun or scary?

After Reading: Beyond the Book:

Create a broader discussion surrounding this book and readership.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. This book was published almost four decades ago, yet it remains in public knowledge as a classic New Zealand book. Why do you think this book has persisted, whereas others have not? Is this book unique?
2. Can you think of any more recent books that remind you of *The Haunting*? How do they differ?
3. How did you find the writing style of the book? Discuss a phrase or sentence that stuck out to you, and why it did so.
4. How did *The Haunting* make you feel? It's normal to have complex, even conflicting feelings.
5. Did you like the book? Were there any parts which you found odd or confusing? Why do you think this is?
6. What kind of books do you normally like? What is it about these books that call to you? For example, vivid imagery, or characters that you find relatable.
7. Do you think we should read this book over more modern ones? What is the continuing value of traditional books?

Further reading:

The Changeover by Margaret Mahy

Under the Mountain by Maurice Gee

The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman

Coraline by Neil Gaiman

A Series of Unfortunate Events by Lemony Snicket

The Witches by Roald Dahl