



---

## Butterflies

By Susanne Gervay

### Educator's Notes:

This chapter study guide, focusing on language, themes, critical thinking, literacy, communication, values and attitudes, uses discussion questions and activities for individual and collaborative learning.

### Dedication:

**Butterflies** is an extended simile revealing the theme of meeting challenges to find self-fulfilment.

- In what way are butterflies like survivors?
- Why does the author call burn survivors heroes?
- Why does she call them survivors and not victims?

### Chapter 1

#### Discussion Questions:

- Why does Mark call Katherine, who has scars from her burns, Dracula?
- What does this show us about peer group behaviour?
- How does Katherine react?
- What does she feel like inside?
- How do we know Jessie and Katherine are good friends?
- How would you react if someone attacked your friend?
- The author writes "the eucalyptus crinkle and crack in the summer heat." It has two levels of meaning. What are they?
- Why is Katherine angry? Would you be angry?
- How did Katherine get burned? How does her sister Rachel feel about the incident?
- The author goes back and forth from the present to the past and back again. How does this technique give depth to the story?
- What does the kookaburra symbolize to Katherine?

#### Activity:

- Research how most children get burned and what programs are in place to reduce the number of burn incidences, what constitutes a severe burn what treatments are available.
- Write the bus stop scene from Mark's viewpoint.
- Select a student as narrator of the bus stop scene while other students act it out. Follow with class discussion.

### Chapter 2

#### Discussion Questions:

- Do you believe that disabilities should be hidden? How do people react when they see someone with a burn or any disability?
- Why does Katherine's mother hold Katherine until she's hurting her? Is there any excuse for this?



- 
- How does Katherine feel about her mother cleaning houses? What does your mother do? How do you feel about it?
  - Find a humorous incident. Why does the author write funny scenes?

**Activity:**

- Have small groups discuss what makes each student angry and ways to deal with anger. Write the comments on a large sheet of paper and pin on the board. Present for general discussion.

**Chapter 3**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Katherine has dreams of Beauty and the Beast. Beauty and the Beast are symbolic. What do the dreams mean?
- Why doesn't Katherine talk after she's burnt as a little girl?
- Katherine and Jessie go shopping to buy a dress. There are three different perspectives – Jessie's, the shop assistant's and Katherine's. What are these perspectives? Is anyone right or wrong? What would you do if you were Katherine?

**Activity**

- Find material about Beauty and the Beast from the web, picture books, the library, computer games, music or film. The material should be diverse and originate in different parts of the world. Bring the material to class for discussion. What do they mean? What is their purpose? How have they been adapted? In what context are they are being used?

**Chapter 4**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Katherine loves swimming competitively. However, the scars from her burns restrict her movement. Why does she hide the tears?
- Katherine uses the metaphor "I am a dolphin." What does this mean?
- Katherine's mother speaks with an Italian accent since her heritage is Italian. Migration has been difficult, so why does she tell her father on the phone, "Papa, my home is Australia."?
- Jessie betrays Katherine by choosing to go with Greg to the dance. Katherine has to go alone. Why is this so painful for Katherine?
- As the sibling of Katherine, Rachel has to take on a lot of responsibility as her mother can't be there for her. Is the mother wrong to leave Rachel to care for Katherine? Do you think Katherine realizes how much her sister has done for her? How would you cope if you were Rachel?
- Why is Katherine scared to go to the dance?

**Activity:**

- Write a short piece about how you'd feel if you had to go to a dance alone. Create a video or power point presentation.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion Questions:

- The butterfly is plain and brown. How does it symbolize freedom and beauty?
- When Katherine is taken to hospital after the burn, she is in intensive care on life support. Her mother is sitting beside her. What does she mean that she can't see Katherine?
- What happens when Jessie "falls in love"? How do girls and guys change when they date?
- At the dance, Katherine challenges her fears and doubts about herself. "There might even be a prince out there for me." What does she mean? What does she want? Is there a prince? Explain.

### Activity:

- Sketch a stage scene on the harbour ferry for the dance so that all the characters can act their parts. Create a role play of the scene on the boat.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion Questions:

- Katherine wants to be independent but she loves her mother. When her mother goes with her to the Professor's surgery, why is Katherine angry?
- Katherine has had 50% of her body burned. She has lost half her hair and her ear. She's scarred down one side. Surgery can give her hair and reconstruct her ear, enable her to stand straight. Are these surgeries cosmetic? Should they be covered by the medical health system?
- Why does Katherine hate and love her mother?
- Katherine is scared no boy will ever want her. She's got confused feelings about boys and men. Why?

### Activity:

- Play the music from the film *Romeo and Juliet*. How does it make you feel? How does it represent love? The relationships between a boy and girl? Discuss.

## Chapter 7

### Discussion Questions:

- Why is having a casual job so important for Katherine?
- Why is Katherine so distressed at being offered to swim in the Paralympic Games?
- What do you think of her coach? Why?
- Should schools accept disabled or different students? Is Katherine disabled?

### Activity:

- Research the Paralympic Games. Write a brief report or make a presentation on one event. Give your opinion regarding these games.

## Chapter 8

### Discussion Questions:

- Should Katherine's mother have followed traditional female roles or made her own decision?



- 
- Katherine's mother loves the garden and the rosellas. In what way does the garden represent the mother?
  - Katherine has a date with William. How does she react? Is it like any other girl's reaction?

**Activity:**

- Search the web, books, magazines, or any other source to create a pictorial representation of women throughout the world and discuss.

**Chapter 9**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Consider the concept of choice. We have choice. Romeo and Juliet had choice. Katherine has choice. What does she choose?
- A child with severe burns will face many years of surgery. How does Katherine regard surgery? How do you think you would cope?
- Why is Katherine not the beast tonight?

**Activity:**

- Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has had many adaptations from ballet, to modern film interpretation, TV, cartoon, music, comics as tragic young love and family feuds are explored. Bring any adaptations to class for discussion.

**Chapter 10**

**Discussion Questions:**

- The world of children in the hospital is emotionally complex. What are some of the issues?
- The technique of short sentences, truncated sentences, verbless sentences and repetition increase tension, as Katherine comes out of surgery. Sparse and edgy description re-create the reality of the hospital scene with all the participants. Do you think longer sentences and more description would have made the scene more or less effective and why?

**Activity:**

- The surgery is over and Katherine is in recovery. Write a paragraph about the feelings you have as Katherine's mother, her sister Rachel, her boyfriend William, her best friend Jessie.

**Chapter 11**

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is a father to Katherine? What is a father to you?
- How does the poem "to be byron" reflect Katherine's search for meaning?

**Activity:**

- Write a poem or song lyrics (with or without music) about relationships with father or research and find a poem or song lyrics and music about relationships with a father.



---

## Chapter 12

### Discussion Questions:

- What does Katherine understand now about her mother's courage bringing her up?
- "It's all right to be afraid?" Why is Katherine afraid? Why are young people afraid? What are they searching for?

### Activity:

- Hold a classroom discussion on the meaning of courage.

## Chapter 13

### Discussion Questions:

- Why did Katherine's father leave his family?
- What is alcohol's impact on the father's behaviour? Is it understandable? Is it acceptable?
- Does Katherine's mother act in a traditional female role? Is Katherine's mother right or wrong in closing the door on the past and not relating to Katherine's father?
- Jessie's father is in his daughter's life. He cares about her. So why is Jessie angry at her father?
- What is Katherine's mother's relationship with her father?
- How does the author use dialogue, interspersed with internal monologue, to reveal character and theme? How does the dialogue between Katherine's mother, Katherine and William, Katharine and Jessie and the interaction between the characters highlight Katherine's search for identity?

### Activity:

- Research any aspect of alcohol and its impact. Prepare a written piece, either factual or creative, to be presented in any medium (music, prose, excel report, power point presentation, illustrated visual display), then share with the class for further discussion both generally and in terms of this book.

## Chapter 14

### Discussion Questions:

- Katherine, Rachel and their mother confront each other about the girls' father. What do each of them feel about the father?
- How does Katherine feel about her body?

### Activity:

- Discuss how body image is a powerful influence on how young people feel about themselves.

## Chapter 15

### Discussion Questions:

- Exams are stressful and there are pressures for the future. What are these pressures?
- How does the author reveal the different levels in a conversation, when people are saying one thing, but thinking another?
- Birds are used throughout *Butterflies* to symbolize characters and journeys. What do the magpies symbolize?



- 
- Language holds meaning that is often more than the words. The mother holds her favorite sea-green mug. The word “mug” is warmer than using “cup,” representing the mother who is warm. The color infers a journey – the mother’s journey across the seas from one country to another. When the author describes the mother’s action – she “brushes aside her hair that has escaped from her bun” – how does this description symbolize her? There are many descriptions throughout the text that hold multiple meanings reflecting, character, theme, tone. Find and share examples of these.
  - The author uses the technique of listing items the mother packed in her old car. What does this show about the mother’s relationship with her children and her character?
  - The details of how Katherine became burnt are finally revealed. Why were the family in the emergency housing block? What happened?

**Activity:**

- Collect and share newspaper clippings, website articles and news items about family breakdown and the resulting social problems. Hold a class discussion on the impact of family breakdown.

**Chapter 16**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why has Katherine has left competitive swimming and taken up Surf Life Saving? What does she like about Surf Lifesaving?
- What is the difference between Katherine’s old swimming coach and the Surf Patrol Captain?
- The author uses her familiar technique of listing actions, verbless sentences, and short sharp descriptions to increase the energy of the scene. Describe in your own words, the surf scene.
- Is Katherine comfortable with her body? Her burns? Explain. What is the impact on Katherine when the Patrol Captain “puts his hand on her shoulder with its grafts and scars?”
- What does Katherine secretly hope her father feels she is? Why?
- Katherine is having fun about boy-girl relationships. She laughs about Mark and William. What are her real feelings?
- Mark “breaks the silence.” This is an important scene as it closes an issue that was opened in the first chapter, the attack at the bus stop on Katherine about her burns. What is Mark confessing to Katherine? How has he grown? What does Katherine learn about Jessie? And Mark?

**Activity**

- The Surf Life Saving program originated in Australia. Research information about its global expansion and share with the class for discussion.

**Chapter 17**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why does Katherine never have a bath, only showers? Can you understand that?
- How does the mood and scenes of the Australian bush reflect Katherine’s confused emotions about seeing her father?



- The scene where Katherine and her father finally meet is a defining one. Why? How? Are Katherine's reactions right or wrong?
- Discuss the literary techniques used by the author to empower the father-daughter scene with ethical dilemmas and emotional tension. Techniques include:
  1. The symbolism of the kookaburra.
  2. The statement "milkbar smells stale" reflects on the staleness of the father-daughter relationship.
  3. The father's eyes are blue. Katherine says that they are "different to mine." This description parallels the question of difference in values.
  4. When Katherine questions, "Do I recognise you?" (Her father in the photograph), there are a number of levels of meaning – the actual physical recognition, the emotional recognition, the recognition of a father in her life.
  5. There is the literary device of two conversations being run at the same time. The actual dialogue between father and daughter and the internal dialogue of the daughter's real emotional response.
  6. Physical description is used to give a character description. Katherine describes the father with "thin lips on the rim of the bulky white cup." The feeling is that the father is emotionally limited – thin lips – at the edge of his relationship with his daughter – "the rim."
  7. The rhetorical questions highlight Katherine's anger and confusion and ultimately move her towards her decision.
  8. Listing events to build up argument and tension.
  9. The dialogue is edgy, challenging, explaining the back story of why the father abandoned the family, while increasing the emotional charge. He did abandon them to hardship.
  10. Descriptions are subtle with emotionally charged messages. The father sits on a "green vinyl seat." The vinyl connects to his lack of authenticity.
  11. The ending of the chapter is powerful in its simplicity. It crystallizes the issue of father-daughter and his abandonment of the family.

"I wanted a father."

"I am your father."

*I understand now, Rachel. I understand.*

Do the readers understand too? Has Katherine made a decision?

**Activity:**

- Do a performance reading of the father-daughter scene with three readers - the narrator, Katherine and the father.

**Chapter 18**

**Discussion Questions:**

- At the end of year party, Katherine confronts William about why he rejected her. Do you agree with William's arguments? Is Katherine right?
- In what way is the cottage the family live in now their home? What literary techniques has the author used to make the reader feel the warmth and safety of this home?



**Activity:**

- *Where am I going?* is the last question of this chapter. Discuss in what way this has been the theme of the book.

**Chapter 19**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Rachel, Katherine and their mother go to an Elvis Restaurant for Katherine's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her mother says, "You make your own decisions now about your life. I will always be there, but it is time." She glances at Rachel. "What is important is that we are together." Is that what is important in life? Family? Even though Katherine is a fighter, would she have made it without her mother and sister?
- Katherine is facing more surgery. The Senior Coordinator calls her to her office to organize an exam concession for a student with special needs. What is Katherine's reaction? Is she right or wrong? What are your views on this?

**Activity:**

- Write a paragraph applying for a student concession for your exams because you have a disability. Discuss how you feel about doing this.

**Chapter 20**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Flowers, gardens, the bush, birds are used throughout the text as symbols. What do the pink and yellow rose buds symbolize? What does it mean when William can identify trees, flowers, birds and the brown butterfly in the bush?
- Does the kiss beside the waterfall feel right? Why?
- Katherine's dream is imaginative and complex. Analyse what it means and the techniques used to create it.

**Activity:**

- Dreams are complex, unlocking emotions. Compose a dream using at least two mediums. Accompany the written text with a medium of your choice such as pictures, drawings, magazine/newspaper cuttings, a video.

**Chapter 21**

**Discussion Questions:**

- Katherine wants her surgeries so that she will be "perfect one day." What is perfect? Is it possible? Is perfection the way you look? How do you feel good about yourself when your body is different?
- Katherine has the operation to rebuild her ear. How does she react when her bandages are unwrapped?

**Activity:**

- Have small groups of students each prepare a poster of images of young people and the way they want to look. Hold a class discussion about the posters and the pressures created by the images on a person's sense of identity.



---

## Chapter 22

### Discussion Question:

- Katherine comes to the realization that "I'll have to accept whatever I am." "You have to believe in yourself. Change what you're able to change, but accept what you are. No blame." What comments do you have on this?

### Activity:

- Music can be your voice. What bands, singers, song do you like? Select one song and print the lyrics. Write a paragraph describing what the song means to you.

## Chapter 23

### Discussion Questions:

- The grandparents arrive from Italy. What are the cultural differences between the old country and the new country?
- What does it mean when Grandpapa calls Katherine – *Bellezza* – Beauty? How does it link to the symbolism of Beauty and the Beast referred throughout the story?
- What do butterflies mean to Katherine now?

### Activity:

Create your own imaginative response to *Butterflies*. Use posters, multi media, create your own trailer, write a story, illustrate, create new endings and journeys.

### Activities to develop further understanding of disability:

- Select an article, play, book, film, photograph or musical piece that concerns itself with a disability, whether physical, mental, social or emotional. Gather the following:
  - A description of the disability
  - What kind of accommodations to daily living does the afflicted person make as a result of having this disability?
  - What is the impact of the disability on the family, friends, society?
  - What is the attitude toward those with the disability?
  - What other ramifications might there be to those with this disability?
  - Share the results of your research to the class through a display, talk, or multi-media presentation.
- Select a disability. Write an imaginative piece (essay, short story, poem, play) reflecting:
  - What's it like to live with this disability.
  - What's it like to live with a family member with this disability
  - How you might relate to a friend who suddenly became disabled
  - How you might relate to an unexpected social encounter with someone with a disability
  - How you or others might support someone with a disability or their family



---

**Notes on style techniques used in *Butterflies*:**

- The book is written in third person, present tense with flashbacks.

The use of present tense gives a sense of immediacy and engages the reader. Third person enables the narrator to present an omnipresent viewpoint, not just Katherine's as would be the case through first person only narration.

- Internal monologue of the main character Katherine is written in first person, present tense and reveals Katherine's feelings.
- Flashbacks to the past are in third person, present tense with extensive use of dialogue. Italics are used in these passages to denote the past and a time and place change. This effectively brings the past to life through the immediacy of present tense with an active voice rather than the more traditional stylistic method of retelling what happened using past tense and a passive voice.

- Significant variation of styles used include:

dialogue

- letters
- descriptive passages
- poetry
- flashbacks to the past
- imaginative dream sequences
- humorous incidents
- dramatic scenes
- symbolism, notably the butterfly, birds, nature, *Beauty and the Beast*