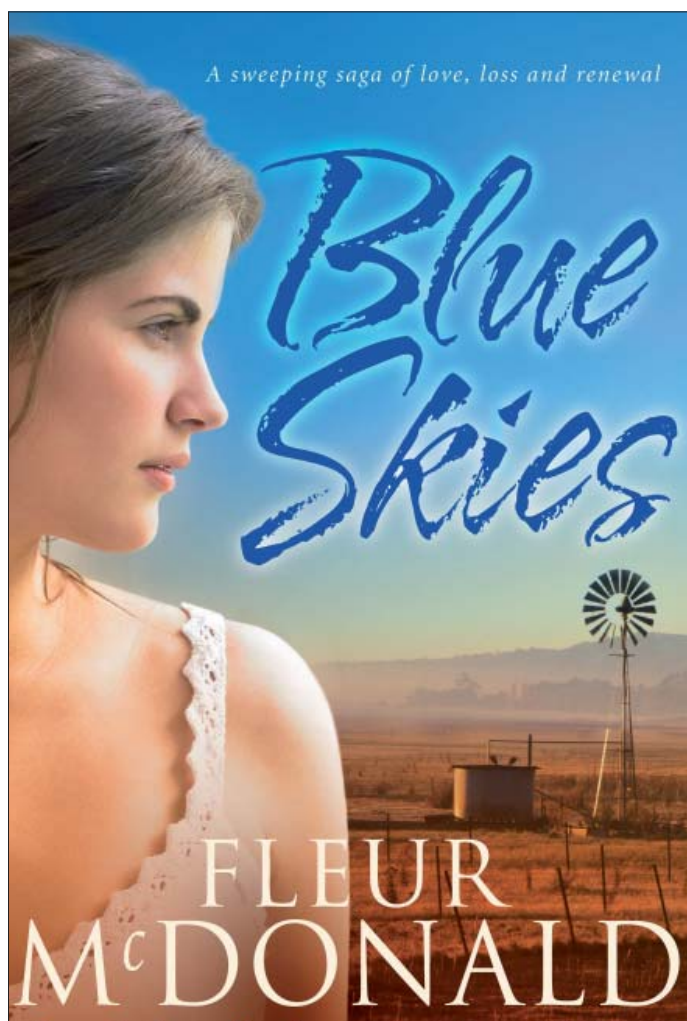


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the Book

In the tradition of Rachael Treasure and from the bestselling author of *Red Dust*, *Blue Skies* tells the inspirational story of a young woman battling to save the family farm no matter what it takes.

Armed with an honours degree in Agribusiness, Amanda Greenfield dreams of employing all the skills she's learnt at college to help her father turn the family farm from a debt-ridden, run-down basket case into a thriving enterprise.

Then tragedy strikes with the death of Amanda's mother in a car accident. Wracked by grief and guilt, and wearied by the long struggle to keep Kyleena a going concern, Amanda's father argues that they should sell up and get on with their lives away from the vagaries of drought and fluctuating stock and crop yields.

Having inherited half the farm from her beloved mother, whom she also grieves for, Amanda determines to summon all her strength, grit and know how to save Kyleena. Along the way she faces mixed fortunes in both love and life...

About the Author

Fleur McDonald grew up in Orroroo, South Australia but completed her secondary education in Adelaide. After school she spent a couple of years jillarooing in South Australia and Western Australia. Fleur lives with her husband and two children on a station near Esperance in Western Australia. Fleur is very involved in the daily management of their 8000 acres.

Author, Fleur McDonald, on writing *Blue Skies*

The idea for *Blue Skies* came after a lunch date with a great friend. We'd been talking about the history of our town, Esperance, and what life must have been like for the pioneers compared to what it was like for us, as farmers, now. We talked about weather events in Esperance and how they seem to be rather extreme and then we got to thinking... maybe I could tie that into a new novel and create the characters and their lives from there!

There were other things that came up while we were talking: rural depression and the code of silence that is wrapped around the blokes who experience it. How their families cope and if the worst possible scenario happens (suicide) how it affects not only the families but the whole community.

Having suffered from post-natal depression, I understood the fog that envelopes people and the inability to see past the pressure of day-to-day life and I felt that I could portray that with some insight. I guess that's where the title comes in. *Blue Skies* is a play on words, both depression and the sparkling blue seas of the Esperance area, so that when things started to get better, there were 'blue skies' ahead.

Reviews

McDonald and her husband run a farm near Esperance, and as with her best-selling debut novel *Red Dust*, the real achievement here is the superb evocation of rural life: you can almost hear the whirring of the shears and smell the cowpats as they bake in the sun.

- William Yeoman, *The West Australian* (03.04.2010)

"If you love Aussie-flavoured sagas, feisty heroines or a mystery at the heart of your stories, then Fleur McDonald is a perfect pick for you."

- Paula Tapiolas. *ABC QLD Blog* (08.04.2010)

Discussion Questions

- ☞ Do you think the portrayal of the relationship between Amanda and her father is true to life?
- ☞ What do you think the novel says about a woman working on the land?
- ☞ Do you think Michael made the right decision to marry Grace rather than Kathleen?
- ☞ Did you find the portrayal of life in Esperance in the 1930s believable?

Suggested Reading

- ☞ *Red Dust* (Fleur McDonald)
- ☞ *Roadside Sister* (Wendy Harmer)
- ☞ *What Kate did Next* (Lisa Heidke)