

# **Sitting on the Fence**

## **The Diary of Martin Daly, Christchurch, 1981 (My Story)**

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### **Synopsis**

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It is January 1<sup>st</sup> 1981. Martin Daly, a 13-year-old school student, begins writing in a new diary. What he doesn't know at the time is that the details of the events that he records in this diary will turn out to be historically significant and will end up at the University of Canterbury in their Springbok tour archive.

Martin Daly is a typical student who isn't particularly interested in either sport or politics. When it becomes clear that the government is not going to oppose that 1981 tour of the Springboks rugby team, tensions rise not only in the Daly household, but also throughout the whole country. There are two vastly different points of view. Many believe that sport and politics don't mix and the tour should go ahead. Others believe that all contact with South Africa, including sporting contact, should be banned until they disestablish their racist policy of apartheid. Unfortunately for Martin (who has always rather liked sitting on the fence), both of these viewpoints are espoused in his own home, creating inevitable conflict. Martin's dad is a die-hard rugby fan who believes that the tour should go ahead. He finds the anti-tour protesters annoying and believes that they should butt out of what is clearly (to him) not a political issue.

Martin's 19-year-old sister Sarah is a university student who strongly opposes the tour. She is strong-willed, intelligent and extremely vocal. Her uncle Ron, who is a journalist, also opposes the tour. Sarah spends a lot of time talking to Ron and the two of them discuss ways in which they can assist with the demonstrations and marches being organised as part of the anti-tour campaign. Sarah's increasing participation in the campaign leads to unbearable conflict with her father and she soon moves out of home. This doesn't surprise Martin as it seems inevitable. But when his mother also leaves he is shocked. His mother has never seemed to have a strong opinion about anything before – she has always seemed passive and went out of her way to avoid conflict of any kind. Now however, she has left her oppressive husband and is deeply involved in the anti-tour campaign.

Conflict over the tour is starting to affect all areas of Martin's life. His school Principal's pro-tour stand and refusal to allow anti-tour posters or demonstrations ensures that resentments are building. When Martin makes friends with Pete, an active participant in the anti-tour campaign, he realises that he can no longer sit on the fence. He must stand up for what he believes

in, even if it means opposing his father and placing himself in dangerous situations where the confrontations between protesters and police will become violent.

## Text Type

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*Sitting on the Fence* is told in diary form. Through his diary entries we learn about Martin Daly's experiences during the 1981 Springbok tour and his thoughts and feelings about the escalating conflict that he just can't seem to escape from. Martin has a very troubled year because within his household there are passionate supporters for both sides of the issue.

This novel has broad appeal and features strong protagonists of both sexes in Martin and Sarah. Teenagers may have heard of this tumultuous period in New Zealand history and will be fascinated by the historically accurate details presented in the story.

The conflict within the Daly household is the catalyst for the marriage break-up of Martin's parents and Martin is then forced to adapt to living at home alone with his father. Living with his pro-tour father makes it even harder for Martin to take a stand on the issue. However, he is a courageous and determined character who comes to realise that he is not comfortable sitting on the fence. He is aware of the injustices that the blacks in South Africa suffer under apartheid and is no longer willing to sit idly by and accept it.

While the main characters in *Sitting on the Fence* are fictitious most of what is contained in the story is factual. Details included about demonstrations, take-overs, marches and violent confrontations really happened. Students who are unaware of this violent period in New Zealand history will find the Historical note at the end of the text helpful in providing them with a social context for the story.

Themes developed in the novel include conflict, standing up for what you believe in, racism, relationships and violence.

## Sharing the Novel

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***The novel has been divided up as follows: Historical Note and pp. 6-11, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 13-92), Chapters 4-6 (pp. 93-152) and Chapters 7-9 (pp. 153-197).***

Before reading the novel have students conduct some library research on the 1981 Springbok tour of New Zealand so that they understand the social climate in the story. You may want them to answer questions such as:

- ∞ What is apartheid? When was it introduced in South Africa? In what ways were blacks living under apartheid discriminated against?
- ∞ In what ways did other countries in the world show their disapproval of apartheid? What was the Gleneagles agreement?

- ∞ Who invited the Springbok rugby team to tour New Zealand in 1981? Why didn't the government intervene?
- ∞ Why was New Zealand divided over the tour?
- ∞ What sorts of demonstrations were carried out by protesters?

During the shared sessions encourage students to discuss and debate the issues raised in the novel. Encourage them to formulate their own opinion based on what they learn about the issue from the text.

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students read the Historical Note (pp. 198-204) and answer the following questions:

- ∞ What is a minority?
- ∞ When was the reality of apartheid brought home to New Zealand?
- ∞ What event led to international condemnation of apartheid laws?
- ∞ How did other countries show their disapproval of the New Zealand government when it allowed the 1976 All Black tour of South Africa to go ahead?
- ∞ How did police and government respond to the anti-tour groups?
- ∞ How did the events of 1981 highlight racism in New Zealand?
- ∞ Who became President of South Africa in 1994?

**Teacher reads pp. 7-11 aloud to students. Students follow along in their books.**

## Comprehension pp. 7-11

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- ∞ Why does Martin decide to send extracts of his diary to The Springbok Tour Archive?
- ∞ Who filled Martin in on some events that he didn't experience first hand?
- ∞ Why does Martin believe that "words have been more important this year than they've ever been before"?
- ∞ Why didn't Martin end up writing his 1981 diary the way he normally did?
- ∞ What day did the anti-tour people decide to hold their last demonstration? What was the name of the group that Martin marched with? What did the protesters find when they arrived at Eden park?

### Discussion

- ∞ Why is it so important to record history and gather first-hand accounts for an archive?
- ∞ Use the computer to find out who Steve Biko was and why he was so important in South Africa.
- ∞ What do you think happened to Martin's family during this time?

**Students read Chapters 1-3 (pp. 13-92) independently before the next shared session.**

## Comprehension Chapters 1-3 (pp, 13-92)

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- ∞ Who lives in the Daly household?
- ∞ What does Uncle Ron do for a job? Why does Martin believe that his father is jealous of Ron? What do Martin's dad and Ron argue about over lunch? What is Sarah's opinion on the issue?
- ∞ How does Martin's mum respond to the conflict?
- ∞ What does Martin's dad read about in the newspaper that annoys him? Why do he and Sarah argue over the content of the article? What is Martin's dad's opinion about HART? What does he mean when he calls them "commie stirrers"?
- ∞ What does HART stand for?
- ∞ Why is Sarah so upset when Martin won't choose a side? Why doesn't Martin feel comfortable about doing this?
- ∞ How did the protesters interrupt the Veteran Games?
- ∞ How has Sarah changed since she started varsity?
- ∞ Who does Martin bump into in Hallensteins? What does his friend tell him about his father? How does Sarah react when she finds out what her father has done? Why does Martin's dad become unsure of himself as the argument progresses? What does Sarah tell her parents she will do if Muldoon doesn't call off the Springbok tour?
- ∞ How old is Sarah? Why does she decide to move in with Frank? How does Martin feel about her decision to leave home? How do her parents react?
- ∞ Who is Pete? What is Pete's opinion about the tour? How do others in the class treat him when they become aware of his opinion? How does Martin know that he and Pete are going to be friends?
- ∞ Who is Mr Mortlock? Why does Pete call him a fascist? What announcement does he make at school assembly? What makes Martin believe that not all of the staff and students agree with Mr Mortlock?
- ∞ Why does Martin finally decide to take a stand on the issue?
- ∞ What does Uncle Ron tell Martin's mum on the phone? Why is Martin's mum initially reluctant to tell Martin's dad what Ron told her? Why is Martin so surprised by how his mother has been behaving lately? Why is he suspicious of her?
- ∞ What does Martin find when he goes to Pete's house? How does he help them prepare for the protest?
- ∞ How does Martin's dad react when he sees the photographs in the paper of the protesters? What does Martin notice about the photo that his father doesn't? Why doesn't Martin argue with his father like Sarah would have?
- ∞ What does Martin realise about his mother when he sees the photo in the paper? How do you think his father would have reacted if he had seen the photo? Why does Martin feel like his family is falling apart?
- ∞ Why does Pete try to start up a soccer team at school?
- ∞ What does SCAT stand for? Who will be leading the group at Martin's school? Why does Martin find this so surprising? Why doesn't Martin immediately agree to join the group?

- ∞ What does Martin learn about his mother from Sarah when he goes to stay at her flat?
- ∞ What does Frank say that has a huge affect on Martin?
- ∞ What does Martin overhear Sarah saying when she and Frank arrive home? Why does he regret eavesdropping?
- ∞ Why do Martin's parents decide to break up? How does Martin feel about their decision? Why does Martin believe that the tour is responsible for his mother's decision? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?

### Discussion

- ∞ The terms "fascist" and "communist" have been used in this story. Use the computer to find out the meanings of these words and explain why they have been used in the story.
- ∞ Describe Martin's dad. What is his opinion about the issue? Why does he feel this way? In what ways does he contribute to the conflict within the Daly household? Why don't you think Martin's mum is happy being married to him? Choose 5 adjectives that describe his character.
- ∞ Describe Sarah. What is her opinion about the issue? Why does she feel this way? Why do you think so many varsity students and academics share her opinion? In what ways does she contribute to the conflict within the household? Do you think her decision to leave home was a good one? Why/why not? Choose 5 adjectives that describe her character.
- ∞ Describe Martin's mum. How does she change? What brings about these changes?
- ∞ Where do you stand on this issue?

***Students read Chapters 4-6 (pp. 93-152) independently before the next shared session.***

## Comprehension Chapters 4-6

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- ∞ Where does Martin's mum go? Why does Martin believe that she might be back? Why does Martin think that Pete isn't interested in his family problems?
- ∞ What is May 1<sup>st</sup> known as?
- ∞ Why does Mr Mortlock call a special assembly? What does Pete mean when he says he'll have a "mutiny on his hands if he goes on like this much longer"?
- ∞ Mr Mortlock suggests that even out of school hours students should respect the school's "neutral stance". Do you agree with him? Why/why not?
- ∞ How does Martin's dad react when Martin tells him that he is joining the anti-tour march?
- ∞ What kinds of people join in the march? What sorts of reactions do the marchers get from bystanders? Where do the four different marches join up? Approximately how many people are involved in the march? How does Martin describe the atmosphere of the march?

- ∞ What does Martin give to his mother when he sees her in the crowd?
- ∞ Why does Martin believe that his father prefers it when he stays at Pete's? Why does Martin feel sorry for his dad and angry with him at the same time?
- ∞ What does Martin's SCAT group discuss at their meetings? Why does Grant Matheson arrive at the meeting late? What did Grant tell Mr Mortlock that he would do if the tour goes ahead? How does Grant feel when the others begin to tell him how great he is? What does this suggest about his character?
- ∞ How does Martin's dad react when Martin tells him he is a member of SCAT? Why does he warn Martin to stay out of all the "anti-tour crap"?
- ∞ What happened at Soweto in 1976? What does a small group of protesters do on Soweto day? What was Pete's dad involvement in the protest? Why does Pete worry that his phone might be bugged?
- ∞ Why does Martin find the SCAT march scarier than the May 1<sup>st</sup> march? Who comes from Wellington to talk to the marchers?
- ∞ As the arrival of the Springboks nears the numbers of protesters turning up at marches diminishes. Why is this?
- ∞ Who speaks at the rally? What idea does she propose? Who agrees to take part in the protest? What information is contained in the pamphlets distributed to the protesters? What dangers do the protesters face?
- ∞ What do the second group of protesters who breach the rugby union headquarters do to get their point across? How does Martin assist the men? What role does Pete's dad play in the demonstration? Why does he quickly move on when the police arrive?
- ∞ What do the same four men involved in the flag burning incident go on to be arrested for? Why will the men refuse bail? Why does Uncle Ron admire these men so much?
- ∞ Why hasn't Martin rung Wayne since he saw him at Hallensteins? What does Wayne say on the phone that makes Martin believe that their friendship is finished? Why is Martin pleased that he and Wayne don't really need to talk at the movies?
- ∞ When does the Springbok rugby tour arrive in New Zealand? What do the protesters call the day that the Springboks play their first match in New Zealand?
- ∞ Explain the different reactions of the students when Grant drives his van into the school grounds.
- ∞ In what ways does the Victoria march feel different to the previous march that Martin participated in? Why is Martin worried that some people joined the march because "they liked the idea of a good fight"?
- ∞ What does Martin talk about with his mum when he locates her at the march? Why does his mum blame herself for the situation at home?
- ∞ Why doesn't the march go ahead according to plan? Why is Sarah arrested?
- ∞ What does Uncle Ron tell Martin about the protest in Gisborne? How were the police armed? What does Ron tell the police that suggest the police used excessive force?

## Discussion

- ∞ The Springbok tour caused huge conflict between those who were pro-tour and those who were anti-tour. Why do you think this conflict at times became violent? What could the government have done differently that might have diffused the situation? Why do you think Muldoon refused to call the tour off? Do you believe the police treated protesters fairly? Explain your answer.
- ∞ Why do you think the policy of apartheid in South Africa evoked such strong feelings among New Zealanders? Why do you think people were willing to risk their personal safety and possibly going to jail over this issue? Is there an issue that you feel strongly enough about to risk going to jail over? If so, explain.
- ∞ What prompts Martin to finally choose a side on the tour issue? Why is this decision difficult for him to reach? How does his anti-tour stance affect his relationship with his father? In what ways does Martin contribute to the anti-tour movement? What does his involvement suggest about his character?

***Students read Chapters 7-9 (pp. 153-197) independently before the next shared session.***

## **Comprehension Chapters 7-9 (pp. 153-197)**

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- ∞ Why does Martin decide to stay home with his father on 25<sup>th</sup> July, rather than go to Pete's?
- ∞ How does Martin's dad react when he learns that Sarah was arrested?
- ∞ Martin's dad believes that everything that has happened with his family is "just because of a few games of rugby". How does this comment illustrate that Martin's dad hasn't really learned anything from his experiences?
- ∞ What do Martin and his dad see when the camera pans the field at Rugby Park in Hamilton? How many rugby supporters are in the crowd? Describe what happens when the protestors storm onto the field? Why does Martin's dad leave the house? What is the result of the protest? Who is involved in the violent confrontations?
- ∞ How do the police "get their own back for their defeat at Hamilton"? What do protestors at the Palmerston North march wear to protect themselves?
- ∞ Why does Sarah warn Martin to "keep out" of any further protests?
- ∞ How do Martin's parents behave towards each other when his mother comes to visit? What news do they give Martin? What realisation has Martin's dad come to about his family?
- ∞ What news do Sarah and Frank give Martin on August 7<sup>th</sup>? How does Martin feel as they drive away?
- ∞ How did Sarah get hurt in Invercargill? Why does Martin's dad want to lay a complaint against the police? Why does Pete describe Invercargill as "bad"?

- ∞ What affect does what happened to Sarah have on Martin? How do Martin's parents react when he tells them he has decided to participate in the actions leading up to the first test?
- ∞ Why is Martin torn between going to the protest and staying home?
- ∞ How many protesters were arrested? Why does Martin think that the police left the SCAT group alone? What does one police officer do to the group?
- ∞ Why do Martin, his mother and Sarah go and stay at Te Rangimarie Marae with Pete's family? Where does the group place spotters to ensure that they know when the Springboks arrive in Christchurch?
- ∞ Why is Mr Mortlock "keeping his head down" at school?
- ∞ Why doesn't Martin take his mother's advice and stay out of "direct action"?
- ∞ Where does the Springbok rugby team stay? What action does Martin's group take to ensure that the team don't get a good night's sleep?
- ∞ How does Martin describe the mood on 16<sup>th</sup> August? How does one group of protestors plan to infiltrate the park? Where did the group get the rugby ticket that they copied? What do the group plan to do once they gain access to the park? What other plans have been laid?
- ∞ Why is Martin so surprised when Pete confesses to being scared?
- ∞ What happens when the marchers reach the side entry to the park? Why do the marshals hand out pieces of greenery to the marchers? How do the protestors know when the match starts? Despite the fact that the game wasn't called off, protestors still feel that the march was worthwhile. Why is this?
- ∞ What does Martin's dad tell him when he finds him after the game? Why is Martin so surprised about this? What stops him from questioning his father further?
- ∞ Why does Martin describe the last march that he goes on as "eerie"?

### Discussion

- ∞ When Martin's parents announce that they are reconciling his mum says "No promises. And things will be different". What things do you think need to change in the Daly household in order for Martin's mum to be happy? His dad to be happy? How did the tour bring issues already brewing to a head?
- ∞ Martin's dad says "I'm not a racist, I don't want to be one either..." Does supporting the tour mean that you are racist? Why/why not?
- ∞ What lessons do you think Martin's experiences during the 1981 Springbok tour taught him? In what ways do you think his life will change as a result of his experiences?
- ∞ Both Martin's parents warn him on numerous occasions to stay out of protest situations where they believe he may be in danger. Why doesn't Martin listen to his parents? What does this suggest about his character and his commitment to the cause? Do you believe that Martin's parents should have forbidden him from taking part in direct action? Why/why not? Why do you think they didn't do this?

- ∞ What lasting effects do you think the 1981 Springbok tour had on the people of New Zealand?

## Activities

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**Newspaper Front Page** – Design a newspaper front page for an important day in 1981. You should come up with a name for your paper and display it on a banner headline. Remember to include the day and date.

- ∞ Your newspaper front page should include a lead article which details the event that happened that day and could include photograph(s). Your article should be written using the inverted pyramid style of writing where all of the important information (the 5 w's and h) is contained in the first 2 paragraphs. You could also include quotes from people involved in your article.
- ∞ Write a second article which gives some background information to the conflict. Your article may provide readers with details about apartheid and the Gleneagles agreement.
- ∞ You may wish to design an advertisement for your front page.

**Editorial** - Write an editorial on the Springbok tour. Make it clear what your point of view is and then develop an argument designed to convince others to agree with you.

**Research** – Research an important leader mentioned in the novel. You may wish to find out more about Robert Muldoon, Steve Biko or Nelson Mandela. Present your findings to the class in role as your chosen leader.

**Glossary** – Design a glossary to explain important words featured in the novel.

**Timeline** – Construct a timeline of important events that occur during the Springbok tour.

**Static Image** – Design a poster protesting the Springbok tour.

**Letter** – Write a letter to Robert Muldoon asking him to call off the Springbok tour. Remember to develop a convincing argument by providing good reasons for your request.

**Character** – Write 2 paragraphs about Martin Daly that explain how he develops and changes as a character throughout the course of the novel.

**Conflict** – Examine why there is so much conflict surrounding the tour. Explain the two different points of view and why the conflict escalates into violence.

**Letter to the Editor** – Write a letter to the editor to express your opinion about the behaviour of the police during the Springbok tour.

