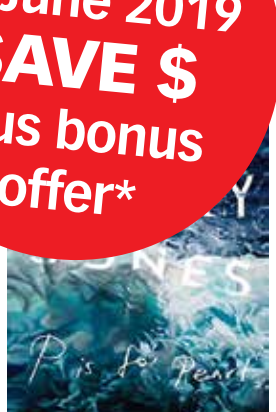
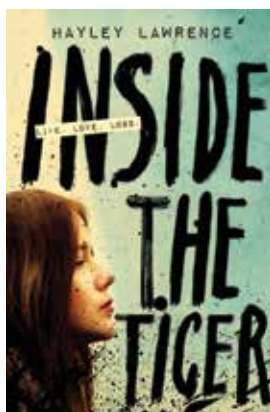
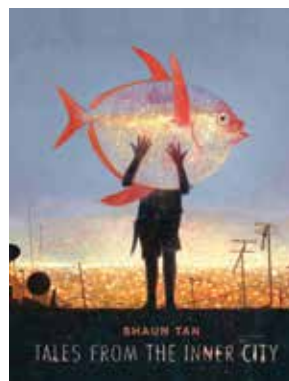
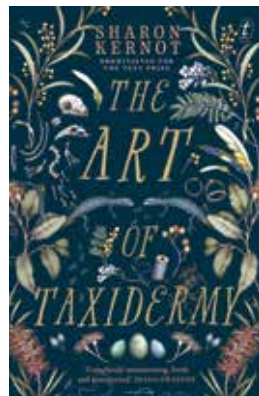
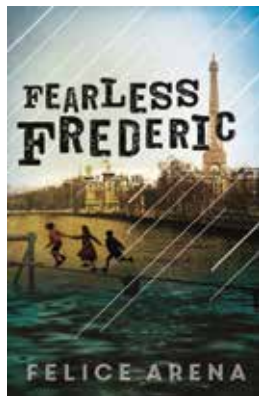
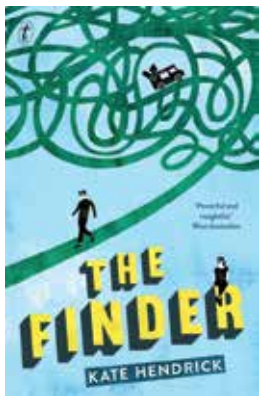


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VOLUME 2 OF 2: YOUNGER & OLDER READERS
THE CBCA AWARDS 2019 SHORT LIST & NOTABLES

APR 2019
ISSN 2204-5708
Vol 2 of 2

Detailed reviews on the latest
fiction to help you choose

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The Book Curator is an Australian magazine and membership service jointly owned by two families who share a passion for books and a determination to provide outstanding service to our members.

We help schools all over the country by providing them with access to helpful information, detailed reviews and the latest fiction titles for their libraries.

Our goal is to provide the resources librarians need to choose the best books for their school library across a wide range of genres, age groups and formats. We provide a wide range of services to help support our members so they can get the best return for their time and their budget.

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YOUNGER READERS
SHORT LIST



Black Cockatoo

Author:

Carl Merrison & Hakea Hustler

ISBN: 978-1925360707

Published: 1/8/18

Publisher: Magabala Books

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Black Cockatoo is a vignette that follows Mia, a young Aboriginal girl as she explores the fragile connections of family and culture. Mia is a 13-year-old girl from a remote community in the Kimberley. She is saddened by the loss of her brother as he distances himself from the family. She feels powerless to change the things she sees around her, until one day she rescues her totem animal, the dirran black cockatoo, and soon discovers her own inner strength.

Black Cockatoo is a wonderful small tale on the power of standing up for yourself, culture and ever-present family ties.

>> OUR REVIEW

After her brother injures a black cockatoo with his slingshot, Mia cares for the bird, even though the prognosis isn't good. The bird becomes her catalyst for change. She wonders at the places it's been and the things it's seen. Thoroughly enjoying her tight-knit community, extended family and culture she recognises an inner stirring to expand her horizons

and eventually see what the rest of Australia has to offer. Her family recognises this and also the value of a good education.

A simple, but poignant tale which gives a glimpse into everyday life for those still living in communities on or close to traditional lands, the line between tradition and customs and the pull of modern life is very apparent. A worthwhile read.

Major themes: indigenous community, family life, injured bird, customs, change

Content Notes: Not applicable.

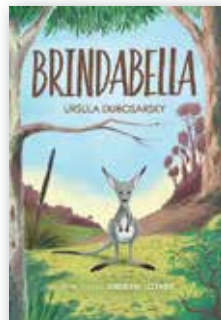


Recommended Age: 10 to 13 years

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Brindabella

Author: Ursula Dubosarsky

ISBN: 978-1760112042

Published: 28/3/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

This is a story about a boy called Pender and a kangaroo called Brindabella, about how they became friends, and all the things that happened to them because of it. Pender and his father live in an old house made of honey-coloured stone in the bush by the river, with only the company of his father's paintings and the loyal dog, Billy-Bob.

Then, on one winter morning,

a gunshot amongst the trees changes everything. When Pender rescues Brindabella from the pouch of her murdered mother, an unusual friendship blossoms between the lonely boy and the orphaned joey. But Brindabella is no ordinary kangaroo. And though Pender has saved her life, the untameable wildness of the bush—and freedom—call to her ...

Lyrical and unforgettable, *Brindabella* explores the brutal beauty of the Australian bush.

>> OUR REVIEW

Pender lives with his artist father in a hut in the bush. His father is quite ill and getting weaker. They have some hens, a dog called Billy-Bob, a couple of cows and a horse. The animals have a voice in the story and talk to each other.

One winter morning, kangaroo shooters kill a roo with a joey in her pouch. Pender rescues the joey, takes her home and names her Brindabella. The vet is contacted and provides a milk formula for her. Pender does numerous drawing of his new pet to whom he becomes very attached.

The growing animal causes some problems. One night, Brindabella heeds the call of the wild and escapes into the bush with the help of Billy-Bob. However, she doesn't have any bush skills so camps with a wombat for a while and gets her tail caught in a rabbit trap. Eventually, she meets another kangaroo, Dashwood and she then has her mob.

After again hearing shooters in the bush, Pender heads out with Billy-Bob. His dad, who is now almost bed-ridden, wakes in the night to find his son gone. With the help of the local vet he heads out to look for Pender. His now grown joey, Brindabella, is in the

hunter's sights and Pender yells as the hunter fires. Brindabella escapes but Billy-Bob is felled by the bullet and doesn't survive. A year later, Pender returns to the place he originally found Brindabella, and she has now returned there with her own joey.

A pleasant well-told story of an orphaned joey and life in the Australian bush. It avoids sentimentality and the animal characters provide a welcome touch of humour.

Major themes: hand-raising an orphaned joey, call of the wild, Australian bush animals, cycle of life, family, death of a pet, roo shooting

Content Notes: Death of a pet.

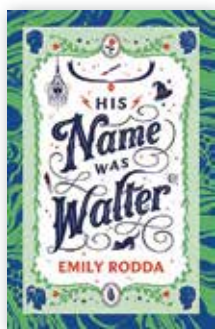


Recommended Age: 8 to 12 years

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



His Name Was Walter

Author: Emily Rodda

ISBN: 978-1460756188

Published: 23/7/18

Publisher: Harper Collins

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

From Australia's favourite storyteller comes a story, within a story, that shows us the extraordinary power of true love and solves a decades-old mystery.

While on a history excursion, an

ill-assorted group of four kids and their teacher are left on a country road when their minibus breaks down.

At the suggestion of a friendly tow-truck driver, the five take shelter in a nearby old, deserted mansion. There they find a little old desk with a secret drawer.

Inside the drawer is a book containing a handwritten story and a series of vivid, strangely lifelike paintings. The book is called *His Name Was Walter*.

The story begins: *'Once upon a time, in a dark city far away, there lived a boy called Walter, who had nothing but his name to call his own.'* And so begins the tale of Walter - his lonely childhood, his flight from the haunted streets of the city, his discovery of Magda the witch, his quest to find Magda's lost daughter, and his meeting with the love of his life, the mysterious, tragic girl he calls Sparrow.

As the night closes in around them and the story of Walter and Sparrow unfolds, the kids read it avidly. Slowly the outer and inner stories begin to mesh. Slowly the story of Walter draws the five members of the group together. And in the end every one of the five plays a vital role in the uncovering of the truth.

» OUR REVIEW

This atmospheric tale is a story within a story. On a school excursion to the historic town of Gralsten, the bus breaks down in a mobile phone black spot. Mr Simon and most of the students hike into town while Mrs Fiori is left with Grace, who is on crutches, Tara, who has a nose bleed, Colin, the new boy and Lucas, the IT nerd.

They seek shelter in a old house owned by the tow-truck driver's father. The house has

an unpleasant feel to it as if something bad had happened there. In a small writing desk with a secret compartment, they discover a little handwritten book titled, *His Name Was Walter*.

They start to read what at first appears to be a fairy tale about a baby left at a beehive orphanage. At 14-years-old, he starts work in a counting house where the other workers are mice chained to their workstations. He learns his mother is dead and his name is Walter.

Walter runs away, pursued by the King's men, but is saved by a witch who lives alone in the woods. He stays with her for three years and learns her son was killed in the war and her daughter ran away to escape her magic powers of shape shifting. The witch tells his fortune - that he will do several noble deeds and die young. After the witch's death, he sets out to find the daughter.

When he arrives at Long Rest, Walter meets the witch's granddaughter and falls in love. He obtains a job in her father's treasure house. The girl is imprisoned in the tower room and guarded by an ogress. She is a shapeshifter and can turn herself into a sparrow, which is how she escapes to meet Walter under the willow tree by the creek.

Meanwhile Colin and Tara push on with reading the story. The others have lost interest but these two are more sensitive to the spiritual influences in the house. They also suspect the story may be grounded in fact.

One room in the house is locked, as the spirit of Sparrow's father, a greedy monster, inhabits it. He attempts to stop them finishing the story. There is a good reason for this. When they read on, they discover Sparrow's father blackmails Walter into going off to

war hoping he'll be killed. Walter returns but is murdered by his ex-employer when he attempts to see Sparrow. His body is buried near the chicken coop. The ogress has been stealing and hiding items in the same area.

Colin and Tara convince the others it's a true story. They find Walter's remains and the family silver. The spirits are set to rest. The brooding atmosphere and even the mobile blackspot is gone. Walter is buried next to Sparrow and the stolen silver pays for the house restoration.

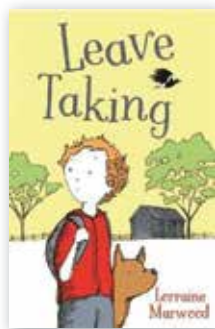
A well-written, engaging story with strong supernatural themes.

Major themes: haunted house, greed, disability, true love, spiritual sensitivity, hidden messages

Content Notes: There are strong supernatural elements within this story. The witch reads Walter's palm (p63) and the girl he loves shape-shifts into a sparrow (p131).



Recommended Age: 10 to 15 years
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Leave Taking

Author: Lorraine Marwood

ISBN: 978-0702260117

Published: 2/7/18

Publisher: UQP

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Leave taking: noun, the act of saying goodbye. What if you had just one week left to say goodbye to everything you've ever known?

Toby and his mum and dad are leaving their family farm after the death of Toby's younger sister, Leah. Together, they sort through all their belongings and put things aside to sell or throw out. It's a big task, and Toby doesn't want to leave the only place he's called home.

As his last day on the farm approaches, Toby has a plan - a plan to say goodbye to all the things and places that mean something special to him and Leah, from the machinery shed to Pa's old truck to the chook house. With the help of his best friend, Trigger the dog, he learns what it means to take your leave.

» OUR REVIEW

In this beautifully constructed verse novel, a young boy camps in a different place each night as his own 'leave taking' in the final days before his family farm is handed over to its new owners. Following the death of Toby's younger sister Leah from cancer, his parents decide they need a fresh start which necessitates leaving the farm his father's family has

owned for generations.

In the final weeks before the clearance sale party, Toby, inspired by a map his father had drawn of the farm when he was a boy, creates his own map of special places.

As he travels his goodbye tour, memories of times spent with his sister unfold. The final night in their home is spent with friends and family, and the comforting presence of Pa (his grandfather).

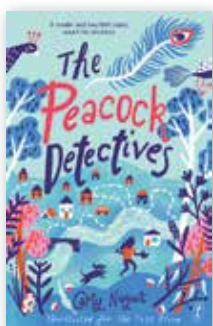
This touching story is richly evocative of rural Australian life, and while the leave taking is bittersweet, there is also the gentle dawning of hope and new life, including a new baby brother on the way.

Major themes: rural Australian life, family, farm life, saying goodbye, grief, loss, hope, memories, family history, moving house, belonging, love

Content Notes: Not applicable.



Recommended Age: 7 to 10 years
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Peacock Detectives

Author: Carly Nugent

ISBN: 978-1925603705

Published: 28/5/18

Publisher: Text Publishing

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

The last time William Shakespeare and Virginia went missing Cassie frund them sitting on a coiled hose behind the fire station, and Dad called 'Cassie Andersen, Peacock Detective'. So this time she knows what to do - she'll look for clues and track them down. But the clues lead her in an unexpected direction and Cassie finds herself investigating a confusing mystery about her family.

The Peacock Detectives is a warm and engaging story for middle-grade readers about dealing with change and finding out who you are.

» OUR REVIEW

Eleven-year-old Cassie's family is starting to unravel. Her almost 15-year-old sister Diana is unrecognisable to her, having decided, amongst other thing, to move out into a tent in the garden and practice Buddhism. Her father is probably bipolar and/or depressed (this never becomes completely clear), and her mother is in the midst of a mid-life crisis, presumably brought on by her husband's bizarre behaviour. She cooks all day and eventually moves out and gets a boyfriend.

To top it all off, her grandfather is dying and we learn Cassie also suffers from some form of depression.

The central theme of the story is Cassie's quest to find her neighbour's missing peacock, which is loose in her small town. She enlists the help of her friend, Jonas, but he too is questioning who he is, having been adopted. So, whilst the half-hearted search goes on, this is really a story about growing up, families, illness and dealing with depression. By the end the main characters have started to deal with their behaviours and come to understand their impact on those they love.

Cassie, like her father, longs to be a writer. Cassie explains writing terms and words in detail, which bogs the story down a little in the early stages. That said, this is quite an engaging read, which is nicely structured and ends on an encouraging note.

Major themes: families, school life, teenagers, depression, mid-life crisis, growing up, adoption, death, bullies, single parents

Content Notes: 1. Teenage Diana is questioning everything. She is given a book on Buddhism so decides to give it a go and starts meditating. 2. Diana tells Cassie that creation isn't the truth and talks about evolution and the Big Bang theory. [p28-30, 72] 3. Main character says she has seen a UFO. [p42] 4. Diana smokes [p20] 5. Cassie believes she has seen witches and fairies. 6. Diana stops going to church [p26] and states she believes in Buddhism [p67] 7. Cassie and her father both suffer from depression.



Recommended Age: 12 to 15 years

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Slightly Alarming Tale of the Whispering Wars

Author: Jacklyn Moriarty

ISBN: 978-1760297183

Published: 24/10/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

I was taken by Whisperers at 2pm, so I never pulled the lever for the laundry chute. That's what bothered me most. This is way ahead in the story, though. A lot happened before that.

The town of Spindrift is frequented by pirates, Shadow Mages and charlatans. It's also home to the Orphanage School, where Finlay lives with Glim, Taya and Eli. Just outside town is the painfully posh Brathelthwaite Boarding School, home to Honey Bee, Hamish and Victor, Duke of Ainsley.

When the two schools compete at the Spindrift Tournament, stakes are high, tensions are higher, and some people are out to win at any cost. Before long, the orphans and the boarding school are in an all-out war.

And then Whispering Wars break out, and Spindrift is thrust onto the front lines. Children are being stolen, Witches, Sirens and a deadly magical flu invade the town, and all attempts to fight back are met with defeat.

Finlay, Honey Bee and their friends must join forces to outwit the encroaching forces

of darkness, rescue the stolen children, and turn the tide of the war. But how can one bickering troupe outwit the insidious power of the Whisperers? And who are the two mysterious figures watching them from the shadows?

From the award-winning Jaclyn Moriarty comes a spellbinding tale of unlikely friendship, unexpected magic and competitive athletics.

>> OUR REVIEW

This tale of magic, mystery and war, starts with Finlay, a local orphan, and his fellow friends from the orphanage competing in the local Spindrift Tournament.

It's their favourite day of the year—probably because they always win—but this year they have some serious competition.

Students from the exclusive Sir Edgar Brathelthwaite Boarding School are competing and they will do anything to be the victors.

When Brathelthwaite wins on a technicality, fights instantly break out between the orphans and the boarding school students. Amongst the ensuing chaos, a little boy from the orphanage goes missing.

Some children from the orphanage, Finlay, Glim, Taya and Eli, take vengeance on Brathelthwaite, leading to a prank war between them and Honey Bee, Victor, Hamish and Rosalinde. They create havoc for one another, all the while the world is falling down around them—their kingdom has gone to war against the whispering kingdom, a kingdom that is using dark magic to overpower anyone in their way and is stealing Spindrift's children.

When the orphanage and Brathelthwaite children meet

two children from the future, they learn that they are destined to rescue the missing children. Forcing them to spend time with each other, the two children from the future sign them up to help with the war cause, and against their best attempts, they start to become friends.

The children then come up with a plan: they will get captured, taken to the missing children and from there rescue them all. The only problem is when Finlay, Victor, Honey Bee and Hamish do get captured, they realise they are powerless—the Whispering Kingdom has people who can control their actions and minds. After weeks spent in the camp, being forced to work in the mines day after day, they finally have a breakthrough. One night they lead an attack on the people controlling them but nearly fail when they can't escape the grounds ... luckily Glim shows up leading a host of dragons to save them.

Told from Honey Bee's and Finlay's perspectives, this story is a whirlwind of adventure, magic and mystery. A fun and exciting read that portrays strong messages of friendship, endurance, perseverance and strength.

Major themes: friendship, adventure, magic, war, strength, perseverance, bravery

Content Notes: 1. They speak about the Deputy Headmaster of Brathelthwaite horse-whipping students [no description given]. This is not condoned or seen as okay by the characters. 2. As you would expect from a fantasy, there are strong magical themes and magical creatures such as: gnomes, witches, sprites, dragons, mages, sirens, ghouls, elves and faeries. 3. The stolen children are forced into slave labour working in their captors

mines, some of these children die in slavery before they can be rescued but details of their deaths are not deeply explored. 4. As this story is set during a time of war there are battles and strong themes of war, however, it is not gory in its detail.



Recommended Age: 10 to 14 years

Suitable class novel: NO

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★

YOUNG READERS NOTABLES



Everything I've Never Said

Author: Samantha Wheeler
ISBN: 978-0702260278
Published: 1/10/18
Publisher: UQP

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Ava would like nothing more than to tell her family she loves them, particularly her big sister, Nic. But Ava has Rett syndrome - she can't talk, can't nod her head, can't even point at a communication card. She understands everything, but no one understands her. When tragedy strikes her family, Ava becomes even more determined to talk. But it's not until she meets occupational therapist Kieran and new friend Aimee that she is hopeful for change - and to find her voice at last. A powerful novel about a subject rarely tackled - young people with disabilities and the families who love and support them.

>> OUR REVIEW

Ava has Rett's syndrome, a genetic mutation that has caused her to be severely disabled. Her brain works just fine, but she is unable to communicate, or even nod her head.

Her family love her and her parents do everything to take care of her. They think they

understand what she wants, but they really don't, and the extreme frustration of not being able to express herself at times leads to pinching, hair pulling, screaming and biting, despite Ava's best efforts to control her outbreaks of emotion.

Ava's parents are increasingly stressed, and her 14-year-old sister Nic is struggling with the embarrassment of having a sister who sometimes screams uncontrollably.

When their father has a stroke and Ava is the only one home, she can't do anything to help him. He is going to need months of rehab to learn to walk and talk again. Looking after two disabled family members is incredibly tough and leads Ava's parents to look at respite options. It's a difficult decision, but in the end, one that opens up a whole new world for Ava. At respite she meets Aimee, a cheeky, outgoing and fun new friend who communicates via a device, and Kieran, who is training to be an OT. There are so many ways that Ava can't communicate, but when, through Kieran's perseverance, they find a way that she can, it's life changing for all of them ...

This is a gentle, touching and age-appropriate story told from Ava's point of view, offering an intimate perspective into what it might be like to be locked inside a body that will not obey you, in a world that cannot hear you.

A wonderful, thought provoking story that will encourage empathy and compassion towards children living with a disability and the families who love them.

It also provides insights into the difference compassionate workers and teachers make, in comparison with those who choose not to understand.

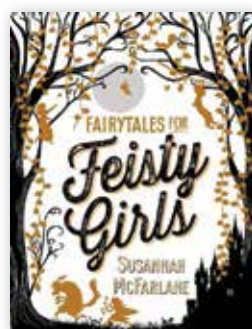
A must read for all children as well as adults working with the disabled.

Major themes: disability, family, Rett's syndrome, communication, sibling relationships, perseverance, love, determination, technological aids, communication devices, the value of kindness, understanding

Content Notes: 1. Language: 'Oh my god' x 2. [p52, 72]



Recommended Age: 9 to 13 years
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Fairytale for Feisty Girls

Author: Susannah McFarlane
ISBN: 978-1760523541
Published: 29/8/18
Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Feisty: typically describes one who is relatively small, lively, determined and courageous. Girls can rescue themselves - just watch Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Thumbelina create their own happily ever afters in this beautiful and emboldening bedtime book.

A glorious treasury for young girls - and boys - featuring artwork from four leading Australian illustrators: Beth Norling, Claire Robertson, Lucinda Gifford and Sher Rill Ng.

» OUR REVIEW

Meet Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Thumbelina and Rapunzel ... these girls are no damsels in distress. Rapunzel, an imaginative genius and inventor, gets out of the tower that is she is trapped in all by herself. Thumbelina embarks on a crazy solo adventure to find her family and makes some amazing friends along the way. Little Red Riding Hood, a budding herbologist, outwits the Big Bad Wolf and saves her grandma with her smarts alone. And Cinderella is a smart and compassionate business woman who sells her one remaining glass slipper to buy a farm and animal sanctuary.

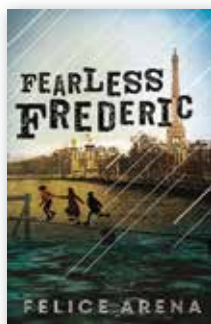
The perfect read for any strong, feisty and fierce girls. This is a beautifully illustrated book with captivating re-imagined retellings of our favourite fairytales. A story of empowerment, inspiration and girl-power with a strong and important message for girls everywhere: you can do anything you put your mind to.

Major themes: fairytales, girl empowerment, imagination, adventure, independence, strength of character, finding yourself

Content Notes: Not applicable.



Recommended Age: 6 years +
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Fearless Frederic

Author: Felice Arena
ISBN: 978-0143786757
Published: 2/4/18
Publisher: Penguin

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

When the river rises and the city of Paris begins to disappear under water, Frederic decides to help those who can't help themselves. But as his heroic acts escalate, so does the danger. Frederic will have to battle an escaped zoo animal and fight off pickpockets and looters but, as the waters subside, can he find justice for his father and find out what courage really means?

» OUR REVIEW

Set during the great Paris flood of 1910, this fabulous novel richly deserves to become a firm favourite.

For his 13th birthday, Frederic accompanies his father to work at the Louvre, where he's a night time security guard. However, tragedy strikes when a group of thieves ambush them and kill his father. Though powerless to intervene, Frederic still blames himself. With his father dead he must now look for work to help support himself and his mother. When he realises he has a way with horses, he gets a job as a stable hand.

Shortly afterwards, a terrible flood hits Paris which will enable Frederic to redeem himself (in his own eyes) and also get justice

for his father's death. He and his mother are evacuated to a shelter where he forms a friendship with Claire and Thierry. The three new friends set off to rescue a fellow evacuee's cat and end up on a variety of adventures. Along the way Frederic learns the value of friendship and also the stupidity of rushing into dangerous situations unprepared.

When he spots his father's killer, he confronts him, but soon realises that will get him nowhere. Having overheard his plans he sets a trap which will finally secure justice and ultimately bring Frederic some peace.

An excellent novel for middle school readers, full of daring adventures, lucky escapes and the true meaning of friendship. The historic 1910 flood provides a great backdrop which the author builds on superbly. Many actual situations are incorporated which also adds depth and authenticity and gives the reader a sense of the era. A highly recommended read.

Major themes: Early 20th Century Paris, flood, evacuation, death, thieves, grief, loss, friendship, bravery, helping others, justice

Content Notes: Not applicable.



Recommended Age: 9 to 14 years
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Help Around the House

Author: Morris Gleitzman

ISBN: 978-0143793236

Published: 3/9/18

Publisher: Penguin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Ludo helps other people. It's how he was brought up. When Dad is elected to Federal Parliament, Ludo grabs the chance to make Australia an even better place. But he soon discovers it's not the homeless of the national capital who most need his help - it's the rich and powerful.

>> OUR REVIEW

Eleven-year-old Ludo's father has just been elected to Canberra as an independent MP for a rural community. Ludo has been raised to help other and do the right thing—qualities instilled by his recently deceased mother and the scout movement. So, on the flight to Canberra it's natural for him to offer his tax payer funded business class seat to someone more needy. This benevolent act will help him when he becomes embroiled in the shooting of a retired minister. **After he and a fellow scout stumble across the barely alive ex politician whilst on a mission to feed the homeless.** Throughout the ordeal Ludo gets to understand about how politicians really work due to the shenanigans of his dad's new chief of staff. However, it's the wily old house keeper who really

knows how to play the game.

An excellent and insightful read, as one would expect from Mr Gleitzman. It shows how power can corrupt, but also how powerful truth and good intentions can be. An intriguing story for all.

Major themes: Canberra, federal politics, Kangaroo culling, scouts, honesty, deception, friendship, helping others/innocents.

Content Notes: Not applicable.



Recommended Age: 9 to 12 years

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Shine Mountain

Author: Julie Hunt

ISBN: 978-1760291501

Published: 24/4/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

An epic adventure from the author of *Song for a Scarlet Runner* about a girl who finds a magical musical instrument, a boy from a travelling medicine show, and their perilous journey to a mysterious land.

On his deathbed, Ellie's pop reveals a secret - a magical button box. It's a musical instrument from the Gleam country - a land far from Spit Farm and the mountains, with talking goats, sweet grass and corn that grows so high you have to fell it with an axe. But the

button-box's magic is sinister.

When Ellie plays it, flowers bloom and crops spring up overnight - but soon the farm is cursed by drought and her beloved oma is gravely ill. To save her oma and discover the truth about her own identity, Ellie must embark on a dangerous journey to the Gleam country - the only place where the evil button-box can be destroyed.

>> OUR REVIEW

This is a well-told fantasy tale of a young girl's quest to discover her real identity and save her family. There are also aspects to it of the familiar theme: 'saving the family farm'.

Winter is coming on, Pop is dying and all the family have gathered at Spit Farm. The lawyer arrives just in time to record Pop's dying wishes. However, before he goes, Pop takes a small accordion-like instrument out from under the bed, a button-box, and plays a magical tune. The box is to be buried with him and it is.

No one will tell 12-year-old Ellie anything about the box. However, she sees the lawyer dig up the grave and steal the box. When his horse bolts, the lawyer is killed and the box is smashed to pieces. Ellie collects the pieces and steals a necklace to pay a passing tinker to fix it. However, the button-box messes with time. Seeds sprout overnight. People age or grow young suddenly under its influence. Drought comes to the land.

Ellie learns that she has no blood ties to the family on Spit Farm. She and her beloved companion, a goat called Nanny Gitto, were left by passing herders when she was a baby. She leaves the farm as her Oma is sick and taking her brother's horse, Sol, as well as Nanny Gitto, she sets out to return the box to the Gleam where it came from. It soon becomes

clear that someone is following her. For safety, she travels with a Medicine Show. The troupe includes Meridian, a way-woman, who maps people's futures and Luca, son of a rainmaker who does rope tricks.

The mysterious stranger who's been following Ellie appears and entices Luca to steal a horse and the box. They ride away with Ellie in hot pursuit. The stranger doesn't eat, drink, sleep or touch anything as he is really a projected image. He pushes Luca to exhaustion and gets him to play the box which strengthens the man but drains Luca. As they get closer to the Gleam country, Nanny begins to talk to Ellie.

Ellie learns she came from the Gleam country. Her mother was a goat herder named Gola, who was promised to her friend Gabe. A stranger, Harland, falls in love with Gola. He kills Gabe and makes the box to entice Gola to love him. He says Ellie is his daughter. They are trapped with him on Shine Mountain in Gleam. Luca's weatherman powers have manifested. He causes lightning to strike the box and destroy it. Harland, his image that's been following Ellie, was only kept alive by the box and he returns to dust.

Luca uses his powers to bring rain. Gola's mother makes a curd with Nanny's milk which Ellie takes home to revive Oma. Nanny stays in Gleam to rebuild the goat herd while Ellie returns to Spit Farm. An enjoyable light fantasy with a great cast of characters both human and animal.

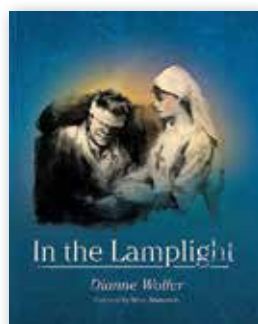
Major themes: family secrets, magical powers, animal companions, identity, courage, journeying, saving the family farm

Content Notes: 1. Meridian uses some dirt from the person's home country to 'way' their lives, eg. tell their future [p104-105]. 2. Minor

references to 'lucky charms' [p110, 160, 220-222]. 3. Luca asks Ellie to do a map for him and she dreams about his weather powers. These are all within the usual context of fantasy tales.



Recommended Age: 9 to 13 years
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



In the Lamplight

Author: Dianne Wolfer
ISBN: 978-1925591224
Published: 2/4/18
Publisher: Fremantle Press

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

If you loved the award-winning *Lighthouse Girl* and *Light Horse Boy*, you will also love *In the Lamplight*, with its combination of evocative charcoal drawings, archival materials and Australian history. Published to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, *In the Lamplight* is the story of Rose, a young English girl turned nurse who cares for and falls in love with Jim, the Light Horse Boy. On the long journey back to Australia they experience the appalling loss of life in the Spanish influenza epidemic, only to face more challenges upon repatriation.

>> OUR REVIEW

Following on from *The Lighthouse Girl* and *The Light Horse Boy*, Dianne Wolfer's newest historical picture book is a wonderful

resource for students wanting to learn about the life of girls and women during the First World War. Presented as the diary and scrapbook of fictional English girl Rose O'Reilly, the book follows her experience of WWI from her village in Harefield, England. This village--and the home the story is set in--are not fictional, and Harefield House, a manor-turned-hospital, treated some 50,000 ANZAC soldiers during the war.

Rose embarks on a journey to become a nurse, working alongside Australian nurses to care for injured soldiers. The war changes Rose's world and inevitably changes her, ultimately leading her to travel across the world, and call Australia home. The story details aspects of the war that influenced the daily life of women and their families in both England and Australia, touching on everything from the suffragette movement, air raids and bombings, to food rationing, enlistment, loss of friends and family, royal visits, changes in clothing and employment opportunities, and the relentless death toll caused by the Spanish influenza, a pandemic which killed more people than died during the war.

Rose's narrative voice drives the plot forward and, paired with the archival photographs, military documents and newspaper cuttings, is moving and believable, making the war seem not quite so distant to the lives of the young readers. It also features fictional postcards, letters and pressed flowers, accompanied by beautiful charcoal sketches by that bring the fictional characters and their setting to life.

This book is particularly relevant now during the 100 year anniversary of WWI.

Major themes: lifestyle changes

during wartime, WWI, British and ANZAC history, enlistment, women's suffrage, nursing, grief, loss, family, friends

Content Notes: Not applicable.

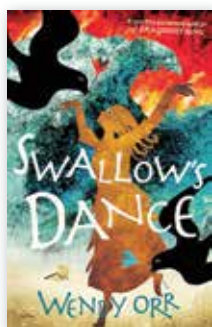


Recommended Age: 9 to 14 years

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Swallow's Dance

Author: Wendy Orr

ISBN: 978-1760297879

Published: 27/6/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

I wonder if the first day of Learning is always like this - do the girls on the hill always feel the ground tremble under their feet? Leira is about to start her initiation as a priestess when her world is turned upside down. A violent earthquake leaves her home - and her family - in pieces. And the goddess hasn't finished with the island yet.

With her family, Leira flees across the sea to Crete, expecting sanctuary. But a volcanic eruption throws the entire world into darkness. After the resulting tsunami, society descends into chaos; the status and privilege of being noble-born reduced to nothing. With her injured mother and elderly nurse, Leira has only the strength and resourcefulness within herself to find safety. A thrilling Bronze Age survival story

from the acclaimed author of *Dragonfly Song*.

>> OUR REVIEW

Leira is a priestesses daughter and is in training to become a priestess. Her world is almost perfect on her island until an earthquake destroys her village. Her mother is severely injured and is suffers permanent brain damage. As a result, she is only able to say 'yes', 'no' and 'fish'.

Sickness then kills many more and Leira's father decides to take Leira, their servant, grandmother Nunu, and her mother to a neighbouring island to try and make her mother well. Soon after, her father leaves to trade a volcano erupts nearby, destroying Leira's home island and its inhabitants. The three women and their dog, Chance, become outcasts and very nearly become slaves.

The journey is heartbreaking; Leira must become a woman to ensure the survival of her family. But even amongst the tragic events there is hope and Leira finds strength and courage that she scarcely could imagine prior to the earthquake.

This is a book about building a home despite catastrophic and often heartrending circumstances; about accepting that outside events do not dictate or control your heart and attitude. The writing style is emotionally charged and engaging up to the very last word.

Major themes: natural disaster, survival, Bronze Age culture, religion and sacrifices to appease the gods, courage, hope and despair, overwhelming grief, womanhood

Content Notes: 1. Low level descriptions of injuries received from earthquakes, tidal waves, riots and muggings. 2. Animal

sacrifices are made frequently including the description of the blood flowing out of the animal as throats are slit. 3. On one occasion, a human sacrifice is described [page 139] including a description of the life of the slave draining away with her blood on the stone.



Recommended Age: 12 years +

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Ottile Colter and the Narrowway Hunt

Author: Rhiannon Williams

ISBN: 978-1760500849

Published: 1/7/18

Publisher: Hardie Grant Egmont

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

In the most thrilling fantasy of the year, a young girl must pretend to be a boy to rescue her brother from a secret order of monster hunters. Ottile Colter and her brother, Gully, have always fended for themselves. So when Gully goes missing one night, Ottile sets out to find him - and soon makes a horrible discovery. Gully has been forcibly recruited by the Narrowway Hunt, a secretive male-only organisation that hunts savage, blight-spreading monsters called 'dredretches'. Disguising herself as a boy, Ottile infiltrates the Hunt - but quickly realises that taking her brother home won't be easy. Trapped in the heart of the dredretch-

infested Narrowway, it's impossibly dangerous for them to leave. But as she trains to become a Huntsman alongside her brother, hoping for a chance to escape, how long can she keep her true identity a secret?

» OUR REVIEW

Despite being the first born, Ottilie has always followed Gully's lead. When Gully disappears she is desperate to find him. Bill, a strange but kind creature, tells her a swamp picker has taken him. He's not the only boy to disappear.

Bill and Ottilie track him to the caves and stumble on a cage full of boys, but Gully and some of the others—those who were proving too problematic for their captors—have already been moved on.

To find Gully she must become a captive too. Disguised as a boy she climbs into the cell, a feat made easier by the fact that the boys have all been dosed with something to keep them quiet.

They eventually arrive in Fort Fiory, and are told they are on a secret mission for the king. The 'creatures of myth and nightmares' are real, and the only ones standing between those creatures who are 'evil in solid form' and the people in the Usklers and beyond are the Narrowway Huntsman. The boys are to be trained up and will spend the next 5 years in service as Huntsman. They are told only innocents can serve, as once they turn 18 any weapon they wield will be ineffectual against the monsters.

First step is a trial to measure strengths and weaknesses. At the fledgling trials, 'Ott' scores the highest and gets paired with the highest scoring elite, Leo, who is somewhat smug and superior and obsessed with staying

number one.

Ott, Gully and a couple of other boys are planning to escape, until they come face to face with the terrible consequences of a dredretch attack. Stealing them from their homes may have been wrong, but Ott can see that the fight is worthy. Instead of escaping, Ott determines to learn to defend herself, be strong and beat back those monsters that have no place in her world.

Keeping her secret is more important than ever. In this place, girls cook, clean, launder, garden and serve as sculkies, while boys fight monsters for glory and honour. She is eventually caught out by Skip [a sculkie] who promises not to expose her. Skip is very excited to find out Ottilie is a girl because it gives her hope that things can change.

When Mr Sloch, the swamp picker who captured Gully, stumbles across her, he knows exactly who she is. After all, he had watched her and Gully for months before grabbing him. He threatens Ottilie and Leo overhears. Furious at being tricked, Leo reports Ottilie to the Directorate who clap her in manacles and put her on trial. They consider three options: servitude in the Narrowway, banishment to the Laklands, and death.

They ultimately decide she is to be a shovellie [cleaning up the dead dredretches]. Since the rest of the shovellies are male, she is moved into the quarters with the sculkies.

But while some see a girl rising up as a symbol of hope [thinking to themselves: maybe one day I can do that too] others are bitter because she 'dared to rise higher than [her] station'. The bitter ones secretly bully her.

When she witnesses Leo being

overcome by dredretches, she goes to his aid, armed only with a shovel, saving his life. In recognition of her courage, the Directorate vote to reinstate her and assign her back to Leo. She's now officially the first female Fiory fledgling.

Ottilie is thrilled to be reinstated, but she is suspicious that things are not all as they seem. Her new friend Alba has been reading her way through the library and hasn't found any reference to innocents being the only ones who can kill the dredretches. Alba did find a reference to witch placing a hex on the king so that no man could fight to defend his kingdom. Is it possible that rather than give up his throne, the king has built an army of children ...

This is a very engaging story with an interesting storyline and many themes that invite deeper discussion in class. There is a strong focus on highlighting the ways in which girls are often spoken of and treated differently for no good reason [for example, "I see weakness ... did they send us girls by mistake?"] and gender roles [girls clean and serve, boys are heroes]. That emphasis overtakes the story at times, but overall it is valuable and will help readers question their own attitudes, words and limitations.

There are also themes of racial prejudice and the indoctrination of children. For example, they pick lonely reckless boys, tell them they have been specially chosen, give them plenty of food, brotherhood, belonging and girls to wait on them. They tell them their king needs them and then they also make it fun. They get to be winners/champions ...what child isn't going to be taken in by that?

Despite the monsters [which may be too much for some younger

readers], this is not an overly dark story. Overall it is an enjoyable read with valuable, thought provoking content.

Major themes: sibling relationship, alcoholic/absent parent, quest, rescue, adventure, courage, fighting monsters, manipulation, friendship, truth, gender roles, breaking gender stereotypes, racial stereotypes, prejudice, poverty, indoctrination

Content Notes: 1. Otilie's mother (Freddie) has a drinking problem. When Gully goes missing, it doesn't really register with her and it's left to Otilie to rescue him. The bramblywine made by Gurt has the worst effect on her [bad brewing]. Otilie hates the bramblywine and the way it has stolen her mother from her [there is a great passage about this in chapter 6], however when the swamp pickers pull out a bottle she is relieved to realise it will knock them out and their state would help her rescue her brother. 2. There are some brief references to the 'old gods' throughout, mostly in the context of carvings on the building, or practices no longer followed. 3. The boys are told: "*Beasties, monsters, prowling fleshfeasters, heart thieves, demons, whatever you called them in the past, the creatures of myth and nightmare, they're real and they're here. If you know any of the old Lore, you may have heard the name dredretch, the deathly scavengers.*" Otilie had heard ... they were mythical underworld beasts, drawn to the surface by acts of terrible violence. Old Moss had told her that they stole hearts, and fed on death and human wickedness, but it was a myth. Mr Parch had always been very clear on that." 4. The fledglings must wear special rings to keep the dredretches from literally draining the life from them. They will eventually

be trained to deal with it/resist it, because. *'your body can't surrender your life without the consent of your brain'*. 5. There are supposedly no witches anymore, but there are a few hints along the way that this may not be the case. In the final few pages of the book, Otilie wonders if it is possible that a villainous witch is controlling the dredretches. 7. Bone singers are girls who have to deal with the dead dredretches. They sense the death and how it happened, and know who the points for the kill belong to. They *'do the odd trick, like a mystic or a timekeeper'*. 8. Chapter 15 – Scoot shares one of his ridiculous stories about witches [urban myth style]. A huntsman steps in to rescue Ott and Scoot when they are attacked by a dredretch and is killed. They always go for the heart, therefore the giant flying spider breaks open from his chest, having torn out his heart. *The cruel, unnatural thing had slaughtered the brave boy who had just saved their lives ... Ott and Scoot vomit..* 8. Reference to ancient Uskler belief that a person laid on a funeral pyre without their heart could not pass on as they should. Instead they would be *'pulled down to the underworld to exist eternally among the dark creatures that dwelt there'*. [ch16]. *Mr Parch always said it wasn't true. Basically the only people who end up there are those who have spent their life doing evil things.* 9. Language; bloody x 1 [chapter 16]. 10. *These things weren't animals, they weren't living creatures of soft flesh and red blood. They were malice solidified, death in bestial form. Even with the bronze ring protecting her, Otilie could sense it. She could smell it. The vapour trailing from their bent feathers and sticky bones conjured sense-memories of pain and fear. What were these unnatural beasts?*

What evil had invited them into the living world? [ch 18]. 11. The smell of human blood gets the dredretches into such a frenzy that they sometimes kill each other in pursuit [ch 22]. 12. Mr Sloch ... *'looked [Otilie] up and down, breathing hard. "It's good luck your body is so boyish."* Otilie drew her dagger and pointed it at [him], *"Stop looking at me like that"* [chapter 25]. There is no other content of this kind.



Recommended Age: 11 to 14 years
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Sweet Adversity

Author: Sheryl Gwyther
ISBN: 978-1460755105
Published: 18/6/18
Publisher: Harper Collins

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

There's never a good time to be orphaned - or abandoned ... especially when you are twelve years old, and it's the Great Depression.

In 1928, Shakespearean actors, the McAllisters, are forced to leave their daughter Adversity at the Emu Swamp Children's Home. They fully intend to return, but things don't go according to plan.

Then, to make matters worse, Scrimshaw, a villainous theatrical agent, hears the talented Addie sing. He plots to use her in his next money-making venture, but

when he turns up at Emu Swamp to collect his prize, Scrimshaw finds she's run away.

Together with Macbeth, her Shakespeare-quoting cockatiel, Addie is about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime.

» OUR REVIEW

Addie McAllister is a feisty 12-year-old whose life goes from one disaster to another. Her parents are Shakespearean actors who find it difficult to find work during the Great Depression around the 1930's in Australia. Addie's adventures begin when she is left at the Emu Swamp Children's home, along with her pet cockatiel called Macbeth, while her parents look for work. About six months after her arrival, Addie wins the Coal Country Eisteddfod's first prize which unknowingly puts her in danger from the child-seller, Barnett Scrimshaw.

The unscrupulous matron of the orphanage puts a plan in place to tell Addie her parents are dead and forge documents to become her guardian. Likewise, she informs Addie's parents that Addie has run away and a search has failed to find her. She is presumed dead after being lost in the bush. Meanwhile Addie finds life in the orphanage unbearably restrictive and she is constantly in trouble. She genuinely runs away when she discovers the matron's plans for her. Addie finds refuge with a group of other runaway children and briefly finds safety. However, the matron's clerk discovers her whereabouts so soon she is on the run again.

Next Addie finds refuge at a hotel, but again she is discovered. This time by the child-seller, Scrimshaw who hauls her off to Sydney along with her orphaned friend Jack, who inadvertently gets caught up in the drama, as well as, Macbeth, the cockatiel

who manages to complicate events even more. Scrimshaw manages to find a buyer for his talented captive with a vaudeville theatre company, but to get his money Scrimshaw has to wait until she proves her worth. Addie and Jack manage to escape but Scrimshaw is in pursuit.

The chase takes them around the docks of Sydney Harbour where Scrimshaw falls in. Weighed down by his money belt, he drowns. Free of Scrimshaw, Addie and Jack find help and Addie is reunited with her parents. This exciting adventure ends with the inference that Addie's parents are going to support their family through work with the vaudeville theatre company. We also learn that the matron of the orphanage is arrested.

The author makes a point of having her main characters face and overcome their greatest fears. She also points out the nobler qualities of her antagonists. The story is heavily-laced with Shakespearean quotes, often from the cockatiel!

Major themes: adventure, drama, family, relationship, Great Depression, Australian history, Shakespeare

Content Notes: 1. The hardship of severe poverty during The Great Depression is described. 2. Scrimshaw drowns.

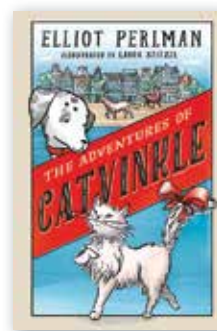


Recommended Age: 10 to 14 years

Suitable class novel: NO

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Adventures of Catvinkle

Author: Elliot Perlman

ISBN: 978-0143786368

Published: 1/10/18

Publisher: Penguin

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

When a pampered cat has to share her home with a lost dog, sparks are set to fly. To her surprise, Catvinkle starts to like Ula. She even tells Ula her three secrets. But a cat and a dog can't be friends - can they? A tail-spin of a tale that will make you howl with laughter - and remind you that if you aren't open to adventure, you might never meet your best friend.

» OUR REVIEW

Catvinkle is a very spoiled cat, so when her owner brings home a stray Dalmation named Ula, she is scandalised.

However, she soon overcomes her bias and she and Ula become best friends. She's still concerned what other felines will think though about a cat and a dog being buddies. A couple of adventures make them both realise that being yourself and sticking up for your friend regardless of the consequences is the most important thing that friends can do.

A delightful, if somewhat oddball tale, which is nevertheless amusing with some very valuable lessons.

Major themes: cats, dogs, dancing, help, love, perceptions, friendship

Content Notes: 1. Mentions ghosts - an old house is said to be haunted, but actually isn't. [p77]

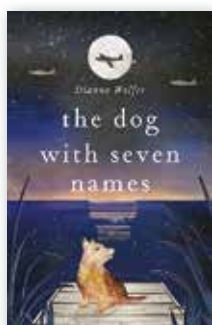


Recommended Age: 9 to 12 years

Suitable class novel: NO

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Dog with Seven Names

Author: Dianne Wolfer

ISBN: 978-0143787457

Published: 2/7/18

Publisher: Random House

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

A tiny dog, the runt of the litter, is born on a remote cattle station. She shouldn't have survived, but when Elsie finds her - and names her Princess - she becomes a beloved pet. Life is perfect until the War comes.

With the Japanese air raids coming closer, Elsie's family leaves the Pilbara for the south and safety. But the small dog has to stay behind. After travelling far from home she becomes a hospital dog and sees war come to Western Australia. She is now called Flynn and witnesses wonderful and terrible things and gives courage to lots of different humans.

But through all her adventures and many names, the little dog

remembers Elsie, who loved her best of all. Will she ever find her again?

>> OUR REVIEW

The Dog with Seven Names follows the trials and tribulations of Princess, a runt; part-terrier, part-dingo, all compassion. Set in the north of WA during WWII, Princess is separated from her first owner and first love, Elsie, and forever hopes to be reunited with her.

Elsie has trained Princess well and soon the small dog is a flying doctor and hospital assistant, bringing hope, love and peace to many of Doc's patients. She has a peculiar knack for understanding what people have experienced, simply by looking into their eyes. Sometimes this terrifies her as the people have been through awful war tragedies, but she perseveres knowing that her people are counting on her to be strong and help calm patients so they can be helped by Doc.

Her life is full of adventure but is not without danger, she loses a leg in a cyclone and is nearly killed by an eagle. She's scarred for life. When Elsie finally manages to send a letter to the hospital and find her dog, Princess is anxious. Will Elsie still love her without a leg and with scars all over her face and body? This is a story of hope; even when bad things happen and our lives are changed forever, love overcomes.

Major themes: WWII, loss, grief, helping others in the face of losing your own life, Aboriginal dreamtime-like experiences, racism, fear of death and fighting for your life, obedience, bullying, overcoming fears

Content Notes: 1. There are frequent, moderate descriptions of war wounds and sometimes graphic description of the wounds.

Though not overdramatised, these descriptions could be disturbing for some children in this age group.

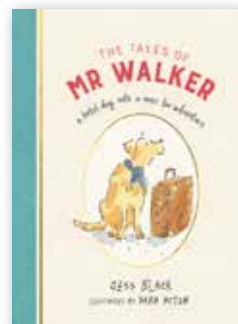


Recommended Age: 10 years +

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Tales of Mr Walker

Author: Jess Black

ISBN: 978-0143793076

Published: 29/10/18

Publisher: Puffin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

On a brilliant autumn's day, Mr Walker arrives at the grandest hotel in town. While things get off to a wobbly start, this charming labrador is determined to put his best paw forward. And it's just as well because the most unexpected adventures await...

The Tales of Mr Walker contains four delightful stories inspired by the real-life Mr Walker, a Guide Dog Ambassador who now calls Park Hyatt Melbourne home. Royalties from sales of this book go to Guide Dogs Victoria.

>> OUR REVIEW

This is a collection of almost-true stories based on Labrador Ambassador, Mr Walker. Mr Walker is a real yellow Labrador who lives and works in the Park Hyatt Hotel in Melbourne.

Sporting four books in one,

each with beautiful watercolour illustrations, our favourite yellow lab goes through quite a journey before settling into his forever home.

The first story tells how Mr Walker came to be at the hotel. In the second, Mr Walker has been at the Park Hyatt for three months and has quickly fallen into the swing of things.

Eager to help his new friends set up the Winter Wonderland ball, Mr Walker learns not to judge books by their covers, or to let pesky cats into fancy hotels.

In the third story, the yellow lab is helping with a much anticipated marriage proposal and even managing to stop some dastardly thieves in the process.

In the final story, a famous pianist is visiting the hotel and needs some four legged help...

Throughout all the stories, Mr Walker sees everything from his bed by the porter's desk. Engaging humour and an interesting perspective will keep readers turning the pages, eager to learn about the day to day life of a Labrador Ambassador.

Major themes: Australia/ Australiana, Guide Dogs and Ambassador Dogs, helpfulness, acceptance, kindness

Content Notes: 1. A dog covered by a bed sheet is described as a ghost haunting the hotel [p19, 21] 2. In book one, Mr Walker is on a run-away trolley heading into traffic. There is a crash but no one is injured. [p44] 3. The famous pianist mentions that his wife died and he lost his passion for music over it. [p174-175]



Recommended Age: 5 years +
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Girl, the Dog and the Writer in Provence

Author: Katrina Nannestad

ISBN: 978-0733338182

Published: 22/10/18

Publisher: Harper Collins

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

When Freja and Tobias arrive in Claviers, Provence, it feels like home. The hilltop village is surrounded by olive groves, lavender fields and drifts of red poppies. The market square hides a world-famous patisserie and an antique merry-go-round. Pippin, their precocious young neighbour, and Vivi, the beautiful chef, fill their lives with chatter and laughter and love. For a moment, the girl, the dog and the writer are happy. But a spate of criminal activity casts a cloud over the village.

Freja is determined to solve the mystery and uncover the villain, but the closer she gets, the more impossible things seem to become ...

>> OUR REVIEW

This is a sequel that works as a standalone. Freja has been raised isolated from society in the wilds of Antarctica by her wild and loving mother Clementine. When Clementine fell ill, Freja went to live with Tobias and his dog Finnegan. Their first adventure was in Rome, and now they have arrived in the small Provincial

town of Claviers. In theory they moved because Tobias is writing a crime novel based in Provence, but in reality they followed Vivi, a beautiful Italian pastry chef.

Freja soon strikes up a friendship with the next-door-neighbour, Pippin, and a boy named Christophe, who wants to enter the clergy. She meets Henri, a kind carousel-man, who was in an accident years ago leaving him with physical and mental disabilities. She also manages to make an enemy of yoga-loving movie star Mimosa Astérisque, who is allergic to Finnegan, and a rich man named Gerard Lachance, who is trying to woo Vivi.

Freja flips through an album of photos of Clementine and Tobias together and struggles to reconcile all the conflicting information she's getting. Is Tobias really just an old family friend, or is he something more?

Bad things start happening in Claviers—Henri's carousel is destroyed, an oven blows up, Tobias's novel is ruined—and at first, Freja thinks Mimosa is to blame. Freja confronts Mimosa—but it wasn't her! She has an alibi and an explanation for each misunderstanding. In fact, it was the jealous Mr. Gerard Lachance!

Luckily, Freja and her friends manage to catch him out, and his inheritance goes to Pierre's family. The carousel is fixed, Monsieur Diderot's oven is replaced; Tobias confesses he loves Vivi.

Freja eventually decides it doesn't matter if Tobias is her father or not—she loves him anyway, and he is her family.

Freja, who initially had trouble connecting to people other than her mother, shows herself to be a kind, friendly and selfless heroine.

The greatest strength is in the full cast of quirky and idiosyncratic side characters, all filled with a verve for life and a love of great food that inspires a hunger for pastries and travel.

Moments of tenderness, like Freja remembering her mother and Henri experiencing the market, evoke bittersweet emotion. This is an energetic and carefree romp, as full of sightseeing adventures and cafés as it is with mischief and intrigue.

Major themes: family, love, mystery, adventure, friendship, Provence

Content Notes: 1. Non-graphic description of a bad car accident. [p38-39]



Recommended Age: 8+
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Young Vikings

Author: James Moloney
ISBN: 978-1743811191
Published: 1/2/18
Publisher: Koala Books

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

When his village is attacked, Hauk Johanson has no choice but to step up and lead the young Vikings on a quest for revenge. But there is one problem—the young Vikings have never fought in battle. Can Hauk and his friends master the skills of sword and axe in time? Will the Gods be on their

side? And does Hauk have what it takes to lead when the fate of an entire village lies in his hands?

>> OUR REVIEW

The story begins with a group of young Vikings out hunting wild boar with the goal of killing the boar, 'getting blood on their blade' and returning to the village as heroes.

The young Vikings (presumably early teens), include the main characters in the story Hauk, Thora (Hauk's cousin), Harald and Kalf. After killing the boar they camp the night in the ravine at which time Hauk has a dream when one of the Viking 'gods' is present in the campsite. The god details the past and predicts the future.

Upon returning to their village of Moberg, the young Vikings find all the Moberg men have been slaughtered by Angor Bloodtooth (a violent warrior from the village of Belvor). Immediately the young Vikings seek revenge for their fathers and set out to find the men responsible. Within a day they discover Bloodtooth's men with their cattle and attack.

Completely unprepared and untrained for the task of fighting warriors they are defeated easily but left to live in shame. They return to the village defeated but the desire for revenge fuels them and they begin training and recruiting other young vikings (including several girls). The training, lead by Harald, has little effect until they seek the help of a wounded old Viking, Torsten.

There is division in the young vikings as Harald assumes leadership but it is Hauk who has been 'chosen by the gods' and has a vision in his dreams. This is seemingly confirmed by a village grandmother, Gudrid, to whom the gods speak. With a spy in their

midst, sabotaging their supplies and giving Bloodtooth intel, the villagers are destined to be driven from their village.

Hauk, after another dream and vision from the gods, decides on a plan to pose as ghosts and scare the village of Belvor into believing that the fathers of Moberg have come back to haunt them. But not all goes according to plan and in the end Hauk encounters Bloodtooth and kills him in a violent attack, escapes on their ship only to have Bloodtooth's men follow and engage in another violent battle.

The end of the story shows the young Vikings as victors, having killed all of Bloodtooth's men and Hauk claiming leadership of the young Viking over Harald.

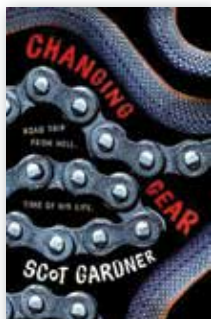
Major themes: violence, revenge, pride, battles, war, Vikings

Content Notes: 1. The various 'gods of Asgard' are referenced numerous times through out the text - eg 'the gods will bring us victory'. 2. Numerous references to revenge killing and the glory in it. eg 'Do you know how many men I've killed, boy?'. 3. Several graphic battle scenes throughout, from the killing of wild boar [p8-9], village attack [p25-26], the initial revenge attack [p35-38], to the final most graphic scene of killing Angor Bloodtooth and his men. [p170-204]



Recommended Age: 12+
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★

OLDER READERS SHORT LIST



Changing Gear

Author: Scot Gardner

ISBN: 978-1760631468

Published: 23/5/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Merrick Hilton's done a runner. His folks think he's studying, but the real world has been calling for years and he can't ignore it any longer. A postie bike, a bedroll and a big sky - that's all he needs. But there's no telling how he'll handle the rough stuff, let alone roadkill, stolen oranges and unexpected romance. And in the real world nothing goes entirely as planned. Thankfully Victor - the old bloke he meets on the road - knows a thing or two about broken bike chains. And broken hearts.

>> OUR REVIEW

This is a road trip story. Eighteen-year-old Merrick lives week-on/week-off with his parents, both of whom have remarried and have new families. But the person he was really closest to was his grandfather. They'd made a pact to trek the 250km Great South West Walk. It had taken eight years and they were 39km from completing it when his grandfather died suddenly of a heart attack, aged 66 years.

Merrick was in English class when it happened and he felt it. He's

just two weeks short of finishing school.

Without a great deal of planning, he packs his bedroll, some food, some cash and hits the road on his postie's motor bike. As a cover, he tells each parent he is at the other's place, studying.

The first time his bike breaks down, an old man [Victor] who is walking with his dog helps him repair it. But when the bike breaks down again it has to spend several days in a small town garage. Merrick continues his trek on foot, meeting up with Victor enroute.

Victor tells him he used to be a university professor but gave up that life and has been walking the roads for the past 35 years. The relationship between Victor and Merrick shares many of the qualities Merrick's relationship with his grandfather did, easing his grief.

The two talk about all kinds of things, and along the way Merrick meets a girl named Felicity whom he instantly clicks with. Merrick eventually collects his bike and heads for home, arriving just as his parents realise he is missing. Later he, his Dad and his half-brother complete the Great South West Walk.

A great read with likeable and interesting characters.

Major themes: road trip, life themes, grief, life being more than science, blended family, intergenerational relationships, dropping out.

Content Notes: 1. Language: frequent use of 'f*ck' (for example, it is used 6 times within the first 25 pages), frequent use of 'shit', 'cock' x 1 [p10], 'bloody' x 2, 'bitch' x 2, 'arse' x 1, 'faggot' [p276]. 2. God is referred to by a variety of colourful terms including: Old Girl, Collective Unconsciousness,

Flying Spaghetti Monster, the Universe [p90] and from them on they reference 'Old Girl'. 3. Victor and Merrick discuss porn. [p187-191] 4. Mild sex scene - no description of them actually having sex. [p234-236] 5. brief reference to Merrick's little brother walking in on Merrick watching porn and masturbating [not described]. [p181].



Recommended Age: 16 years +

Suitable class novel: NO

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Between Us

Author: Clare Atkins

ISBN: 978-1760640217

Published: 29/1/18

Publisher: Black Inc

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

From the award-winning author of *Nona & Me* comes a stunning new novel about two teenagers separated by cultural differences, their parents' expectations and twenty kilometres of barbed-wire fence. Is it possible for two very different teenagers to fall in love despite high barbed-wire fences and a political wilderness between them?

Anahita is passionate, curious and determined. She is also an Iranian asylum seeker who is only allowed out of detention to attend school. On weekdays, during school hours, she can be a 'regular Australian girl'.

Jono needs the distraction of an infatuation. In the past year his mum has walked out, he's been dumped and his sister has moved away. Lost and depressed, Jono feels as if he's been left behind with his Vietnamese single father, Kenny.

Kenny is struggling to work out the rules in his new job; he recently started work as a guard at the Wickham Point Detention Centre. He tells Anahita to look out for Jono at school, but quickly comes to regret this, spiraling into suspicion and mistrust.

Who is this girl, really? What is her story? Is she a genuine refugee or a queue jumper? As Jono and Anahita grow closer, Kenny starts snooping behind the scenes ...

» OUR REVIEW

Anahita is an Iranian asylum seeker at Wickham Point Detention Centre. Jono is a Vietnamese-Australian son of one of the guards at Wickham Point Detention Centre. Kenny is a Vietnamese migrant guard who took a job at Wickham Point Detention Centre to feed his son. *Between Us* beautifully entwines the perspectives of these three people, providing insight into the hypocrisy and bigotry that some exhibit towards asylum seekers.

When Anahita starts at Darwin High School, she catches the attention of brooding, increasingly depressed and substance-abusing Jono, who is going through a hard time after his mother and girlfriend left him. He shares with Anahita his 'beautiful ugly' music on an ipod and a warm friendship, and even a romance, blossoms between them, based upon cultural understanding. However, Jono soon understands that there is so much Anahita is keeping from him—like her whole life in Iran and her detention at Wickham Point.

Wickham Point holds, behind a cyclone fence, pregnant women and children who have been transported from Nauru and Manus Island, without their partners—it essentially acts like a prison for asylum seekers. Anahita's mother is pregnant and slowly withdrawing as every caseworker leaves her family in detention and separated from her boyfriend, Abdul.

Anahita has PTSD from her life in Iran and is still overwhelmed by night terrors about it.

Australia held the promise of freedom and Jono means a chance at a new start. However, Kenny is racially intolerant and tries to keep Jono away from Anahita—believing that Anahita will manipulate and use his son to earn freedom in Australia. He starts to poison Jono's beliefs about Anahita and one day, when a desperate Anahita asks Jono to release photos of babies locked up in Wickham Point (a violation of Human Rights), Jono mistakes it as an act of coercion, falling into an 'us and them' mentality.

Anahita's family is moved to Sydney and given a government-provided house. Abdul is still on Nauru. Anahita never returns Jono's messages of apology as she begins a new life again.

Major themes: Asylum seeker, refugees, detention, drug abuse, discrimination, human rights, self harm, mental health, family, multiculturalism, border policies, nationalism, differences

Content Notes: 1. Language: 'f**k' x 14 [p26, 45, 51, 58, 65, 70, 126, 136, 137, 143, 144, 216, 243, 250], 'shit' x 3, 'bitch' x 1. 2. Anahita has a history of turbulence, violence and self-harm that comes out via fragmented memories throughout the book. 3. The Iranian government mistreated women and children,

and probably killed Anahita's dad. 4. Anahita has a raw and bloody scalp as she self-harms in the middle of nightmares. 5. References to smoking and dealing marijuana. [p4, 53, 113, 140, 142, 243] 6. Kissing. [p20] 7. Jono gets into a fist fight because he's drunk. [p247-248]



Recommended Age: 14 years +
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Art of Taxidermy

Author: Sharon Kernot
ISBN: 978-1925603743
Published: 2/7/18
Publisher: Text Publishing

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Lottie collects dead creatures and lovingly cares for them, hoping to preserve them, to save them from disintegration. Her father understands - Lottie has a scientific mind, he thinks. Her aunt wants it to stop, and she goes to cruel lengths to make sure it does.

And her mother? Lottie's mother died long ago. And Lottie is searching for a way to be close to her.

The Art of Taxidermy is a heartbreaking verse novel exploring love and death, grief and beauty, and the ways we try to make sense of it all.

» OUR REVIEW

After discovering the remains of a gecko in her house at the age of eleven, Charlotte fell in love with death. Entranced with the beauty of resurrection, she follows her heart to the art of taxidermy. With her father's encouragement and despite her aunt's hindrance, Charlotte explores her feelings around the multitude of deaths in her family through the rescue and preservation of animal corpses.

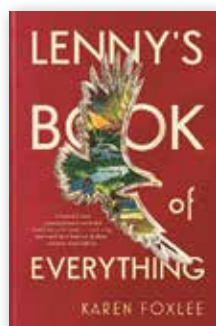
Ethereal and melodic, shocking and poignant, *The Art of Taxidermy* is a new art form. Written in poetic paragraphs to convey the grief, loss and change of a young German girl in post World War 2 Australia, this is a truly transcendent story. Outstanding.

Major themes: death, loss, sadness, war, Australia, erasure of indigenous culture, change, racism, sexism, acceptance

Content Notes: 1. Death is mentioned very frequently, plus mildly graphic descriptions of death and decay. 2. Mention of WW2 and POW camps, Charlottes Opa and Father were held in Loveday camp and her Opa died there. [p131-132, 135-136] 3. Charlotte's older sister Annie drowned as a child and now Charlotte sees her ghost and frequently talks and reacts to her. You don't find out that Annie is dead until nearly the end of the book, though there are hints and some might figure it out before the twist. 4. Language and racist terms for Germans, Aboriginals and people of colour. [p170]



Recommended Age: 15 year +
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Lenny's Book of Everything

Author: Karen Foxlee
ISBN: 978-1760529444
Published: 24/10/18
Publisher: Allen & Unwin

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Our mother had a dark heart feeling. Lenny's younger brother has a rare form of gigantism and while Lenny's fiercely protective, it isn't always easy being the sister of 'the giant'. A book about finding good in the bad that will break your heart while raising your spirits in the way that only a classic novel can.

» OUR REVIEW

The Spinks are an ordinary family. There is bug-loving Lenore, the big-hearted Davey and Cynthia, the ever-worried mum. The one bright spot in their lives is the 'Burrell's Build-It-At-Home Encyclopedia', where they get to peek at all the wonders beyond their small town.

One day their ordinariness becomes extraordinary when Davey starts growing and growing and growing. To pay for Davey's new shoes and new clothes, Cynthia works two jobs at the Retirement Home and at Mr King's Fruit Shop.

The year continues on with each new volume of the encyclopedia arriving at their doorstep, to the delight of the children. They plan to journey to Great Bear

Lake together one day. Davey still grows and the slimy Mr King regularly comes for meatloaf dinners much to the horror of Lenore. One day Mr King tries to make an advance on Cynthia, and she pushes him away. In revenge, Lenore throws a stone at his window and is informed on by the town neighbour, but Mr King never comes to visit again.

Davey's health continues to deteriorate and Lenore starts to realise that their plans for adventure will probably never happen. He has tumours that at first seem operable, but are too tenacious for radiation and surgery.

Davey will not get better and the only delight in his life, as walking and breathing become increasingly difficult, are the volumes of encyclopaedias that still arrive and which he and his sister Lenore travel through together, a journey that Lenore is left to finish on her own ...

This is a beautiful, poignant and touching story. The use of the encyclopaedias as a literacy device to set the pace and illuminate the journey travelled by the characters is inspired. A really lovely read.

Major themes: family, sacrifice, death, love, knowledge, dreams, beetles, cancer, sibling relationship

Content Notes: 1. Lenny's illness and death is touching and sad, but appropriately handled for the target audience.



Recommended Age: 10 to 15 years
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Bogan Modrian

Author: Steven Herrick

ISBN: 978-0702259982

Published: 3/9/18

Publisher: UQP

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Luke sleepwalks through his days; wagging school, swimming at the reservoir and eating takeaway pizza. That is until Charlotte shows up. Rumour is she got expelled from her city school and her family moved to the Blue Mountains for a fresh start. But when Luke's invited to her house, he discovers there's a lot more going on than meets the eye.

>> OUR REVIEW

When books you don't necessarily think you'll enjoy turn out to be exceptional novels, you've experienced the power of an accomplished writer, and Steven Herrick is amongst the most highly regarded.

This effective work does not disappoint, dealing with societal perceptions, domestic violence and grief in the lives of two main characters: Year Eleven students Luke and Charlotte.

Luke has recently lost his father and is from the wrong side of town. He lives with his mum and they barely survive on her meagre wage. In contrast, Charlotte is from a very well to do family who have recently moved to the area. Neither is challenged mentally by school, so Luke wags whenever he feels like it and hangs out with

his friend Blake. As his friendship with Charlotte grows, she joins them.

Eventually she confides in Luke that her father regularly hits her mum. Luke is taken aback, as outwardly they appear to be a perfect family. His parents may have been poor, but he'd never experienced anything like that. Charlotte's mum refuses to go to the police for fear of what her husband will do and what everyone will think, but Luke is determined to intervene and find a solution. This intensifies when he breaks into their house, only for Charlotte's family to return home. Her dad kills Luke's dog because of his actions.

The friends finally land on the idea of secretly filming her dad hitting his wife. Charlotte isn't thrilled by this, but sees the merit in it. Luke knows a petty thief who "loans" him a camera, and once they have the footage they confront her father. While he's initially on the attack, the threat of public exposure and what it would do to his all-important reputation makes him back down and agree to their demand.

Luke is a wonderful character, displaying empathy and a quiet strength coupled with a determination to do the right thing. His interactions with those around him show that though he lacks material things, his parents gave him something infinitely more valuable. His character also goes against societal perception, which is quite deliberate.

Interestingly, when he raises the issue of domestic violence with his mum she immediately thinks of Rodney, the petty thief, who may earn a dishonest living but in other ways is an honourable man.

This book is a must-read and would serve as a valuable text for generating class discussions.

Major themes: domestic violence, grief, growing up, taking responsibility, exposure, friendship, help, family societal perception, image, power

Content Notes: 1. Language: f**k x 9 [p17, 90, 133, 178, 184, 204, 209, 233], dickhead x 2 [p69, 103], shit x 2 [p103, 152]. 2. Minimal use of substances, e.g. joint smoking [p47-50] and drinking [p224]. 3. Charlotte's father hits his wife [p54], talk about domestic violence [p70]. 4. Mild, infrequent sexual content, e.g. Charlotte jokes about having sex with her female Art teacher [p87, 205] and "We haven't had sex and you're already pregnant!" [p211]



Recommended Age: 15 years +

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Small Spaces

Author: Sarah Epstein

ISBN: 978-1921977381

Published: 1/4/18

Publisher: Walker Books

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Tash Carmody has been traumatised since childhood, when she witnessed her gruesome imaginary friend Sparrow lure young Mallory Fisher away from a carnival. At the time nobody believed Tash, and she has since come to accept that Sparrow wasn't real. Now fifteen and mute, Mallory's never spoken about the week she went missing. As

disturbing memories resurface, Tash starts to see Sparrow again. And she realises Mallory is the key to unlocking the truth about a dark secret connecting them. Does Sparrow exist after all? Or is Tash more dangerous to others than she thinks?

» OUR REVIEW

This debut novel by Sarah Epstein is a psychological thriller. It focuses around a dark secret linking two of the main characters, Natasha [Tash] Carmody and Mallory Fisher. The complicated narrative structure alternates chapters between the past [the 'then'], and the present [the 'now']. In the 'then' Tash is eight-years-old and Mallory is six-years-old. The 'now' has Tash as a 17-year-old in Year 12 at school and Mallory as a 15-year-old.

What links the two is the fact that Tash was present when Mallory went missing from a carnival. Tash was staying with her Aunt Alley when Mallory turned up seven days later dishevelled, bleeding and with hair pulled out, not remembering anything about the past week and unable to speak. Tash tells her parents and the police that she saw somebody take Mallory but no one believes her. The Fishers leave town to make a new start and Tash lives the next eight years having people believe that she lied about Mallory to get attention.

For the majority of the book it's unclear what is truth and what is imaginary, who to trust and who not to trust. The novel is set in the mid north coast of New South Wales. The first is the fictional small coastal town of Port Bellamy where Tash and most of the other characters live and the second is an hour's drive away in the rural area of Greenwillow and Willow Creek where Tash's Aunt Alley has her home.

Tash, now aged 17, is trying to get on with her life, having come to the belief [after much therapy] that she imagined Mallory's abduction. As she wants to leave home after school to go to university she is concentrating on convincing her parents she is emotionally stable and can look after herself, however the past keeps haunting her. When the Fishers return to Port Bellamy Tash's life becomes more complicated as her memories start resurfacing.

Tash gets emotionally involved with Mallory's brother Morgan who she knew as a child. Morgan is also affected by Mallory's disappearance as he blames himself. Tash and Morgan are thrown more closely together when they have to collaborate on a school project that plays into the themes of the novel—Tash with her photography and Morgan with his art. This project also takes them back to the now deserted carnival.

The novel is told in first-person narrative, alternating between Tash's childhood voice and her teenage voice. Both are unreliable. The 'then' chapters include transcripts of Tash's psychiatric sessions and newspaper reports, which, to a certain extent, allow readers to form their own opinions. The flashbacks help build tension and pacing. Three possible scenarios develop: 1. It could all be real, 2. It could be some type of psychological trauma with Tash's imagination covering up a reality that is too difficult to accept, 3. It could be a supernatural phenomenon.

When Aunt Alley invites Tash to stay with her again—at the same time as Mallory and Morgan are staying at their nearby holiday house—the resolution to the

story unfolds. The ending is quite violent, frightening and filled with suspense. It turns out that there is a connection between Sparrow is not imaginary at all. He is a drug addict with connections to Aunt Alley [a drug dealer and his childhood sweetheart]. The major theme is lack of trust that expands to include a sense of injustice and powerlessness. When those who are close to us don't believe us or we can't trust them, it makes us extremely vulnerable.

This is a cleverly constructed novel with the alternating chapters of past and present adding to the element of tension. There are lots of twists and turns that give the novel a pacy style. Metaphors, clever phrases and sharp and believable teenage dialogue add to the atmosphere.

The title of the book invokes Tash's phobia of being locked in small places, but also the psychological state where she doesn't know if she can trust the small space inside her head. There is a depth to this story that readers will enjoy. The character, plot and setting all enlighten the theme and there is much to think about.

Major themes: drugs, addiction, psychological thriller, suspense, claustrophobia, fear, bullying, selective mutism, abduction, dissociative amnesia, secrets, crime, mental illness, family, photography, romance, friendship

Content Notes: Language: shit x 12, Christ/Jesus x 9 [p24, 99, 121, 142, 214, 247, 266, 340, 365], bastard x 3, bitches x 3, bloody hell x 1. 2. Kissing [p145, 179].



Recommended Age: 14 years +
Suitable class novel: NO

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★

OLDER READERS NOTABLES



A Song Only I Can Hear

Author: Barry Jonsberg

ISBN: 978-1760630836

Published: 27/6/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Good evening, Rob. Your first challenge follows. These challenges have nothing to do with impressing Destry Camberwick. They are all to do with Rob Fitzgerald impressing Rob Fitzgerald. Bear that in mind at all times. Challenge 1. You will enter the Milltown's Got Talent competition. This gives you over a fortnight to polish your act and work out strategies to overcome panic attacks. I would wish you luck but the point of this challenge is that you don't need it.

Introducing Rob Fitzgerald: thirteen years old and determined to impress the new girl at school, but it's a difficult task for a super-shy kid who is prone to panic attacks that include vomit, and genuine terror that can last all day. An anonymous texter is sending Rob challenges and they might just help. Or not. Beautifully moving and full of heart and humour, *A Song Only I Can Hear* is a delightful novel about dreaming big, being brave and marching to the beat of your own drum.

>> OUR REVIEW

Rob Fitzgerald is in love with transfer student Destry Camberwick. But 13-year-old Rob also suffers from panic attacks and can barely speak a word in public settings. First Rob tries to impress Destry with his performance on the soccer pitch, discovering along the way that he has a knack for goal keeping. Then, a mysterious stranger messages Rob, challenging him to capture Destry's attention by showing more of his bold streak. The first task is to enter 'Milltown's Got Talent'. Further tasks help Rob to find passion in his own interests and to stand up for himself and what he believes in.

Meanwhile, Rob seeks to learn more about his Grandad's past. His Grandad, Pat, has been an important figure in his life but has mostly remained tight-lipped about his military service and his marriage. Rob learns that his Grandfather fought in the Vietnam War, and has Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome [PTSD]. The memories that haunted him grew too much for his wife, who returned to Italy while leaving him to raise Rob's father. Shortly after revealing this his Grandad dies, leaving Rob to grieve the important relationship they had.

In his grief, Pat's neighbour Agnes admits that she was sending the challenges to Rob, under instructions from his grandfather. His final challenge is: 'Stop hiding. Be proud of who you are.'

Rob's birth name is revealed at the school awards ceremony to be 'Roberta Catherine Fitzgerald'. It was his choice to share his transgender identity openly, though many of his classmates were already aware and most are accepting. The reader also learns that Rob has been a somewhat

unreliable narrator, as Ms. Pritchett—his supposed teacher—is really his therapist, his father does not completely accept his transgender identity, and the Daniel Smith 'bully' character is an amalgamation of bullying that Rob has faced from other students. In the end, Rob realises that Destry—who also doesn't quite understand Rob's gender identity—is not the love of his life, but that he has come to accept his own identity.

A Song Only I Can Hear is told in a funny and relatable way. While it deals with LGBTQI+ themes, more generally it touches on the struggle for self-acceptance many encounter in their teen years. A charming middle-grade book that centres on owning who you are and marching to the song that only you can hear.

Major themes: Identity, family, anxiety, grief, bullying, transgender, LGBTQI+

Content Notes: 1. It is somewhat insinuated, by the quick manner of death and the dialogue 'I didn't want it to happen like this. But I can't stop it. Forgive me' that Rob's Grandad committed suicide. This is not confirmed by the text but is a possible interpretation. 2. Threats of physical violence and bullying towards Rob by the 'Daniel Smith' character. [p232] 3. Rob punches 'Daniel Smith' after the death of his grandfather and later apologises. [p235] 3. Rob and Destry kiss, and she makes a somewhat transphobic comment asking him if kissing her makes his sexual identity 'gay'. [p264]

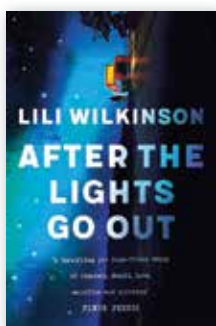


Recommended Age: 10 to 14 years

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



After the Lights Go Out

Author: Lili Wilkinson

ISBN: 978-1760297299

Published: 25/7/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

What happens when the lights go off after what might truly be an end-of-the-world event? How do you stay alive? Who do you trust? How much do you have to sacrifice? Seventeen-year-old Pru Palmer lives with her twin sisters, Grace and Blythe, and their father, Rick, on the outskirts of an isolated mining community. The Palmers are doomsday preppers. They have a bunker filled with non-perishable food and a year's worth of water.

One day while Rick is at the mine, the power goes out. At the Palmers' house, and in the town. All communication is cut. No one knows why. It doesn't take long for everything to unravel. In town, supplies run out and people get desperate. The sisters decide to keep their bunker a secret. The world is different; the rules are different. Survival is everything, and family comes first.

>> OUR REVIEW

This disaster survival story follows Prudence [Pru] Palmer and her family of doomsday preppers: father Rick and 15-year-old twin sisters Blythe and Grace.

Rick has set up an underground

bunker that they call The Paddock, filled with non-perishable food, water, medical supplies and survival gear that will allow them to survive for a lengthy time in the advent of a mass apocalyptic event. He has also instilled the girls with the belief that under any circumstances family must come first. As the story unfolds this mindset becomes problematic for Pru when she comes to the realisation that other people matter and that she has a moral obligation to offer help and support.

Jubilee, a small and isolated town in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, is a fly-in, fly-out location for the Jumuluny zinc mine. The nearby Lake Lingiari supplies water to the town. The Palmers live about fifteen kilometres from the township, while The Paddock is another kilometre away from them. Rick has indoctrinated the girls to be prepared for disaster, so they have emergency drills to get to The Paddock as quickly and safely as possible. As part of their survival they also have bug-out bags which provide for a few days isolated in the bush. When Rick and the other mining personnel are called in for safety training at work, the power goes out in town and at the Palmer home.

Pru realises that it is not an ordinary blackout and goes with Mateo (the son of the woman running the safety training) to see what has happened at the mine. There has been a catastrophic disaster due to an electromagnetic pulse. Lives have been lost and they return to Jubilee with the injured survivors.

There is an initial breakdown in society because of food shortages, and things become more complicated when Pru and the twins reveal what they have

stored in The Paddock to Mateo and another local boy, Keller. Mateo is unable to accept that Pru would ethically be able to keep The Paddock a secret when so many people have need of food and medicine. Then, at a town meeting, Grace accidentally shoots Blythe dead.

The townspeople are livid when they find out the girls have been keeping the bunker secret and steal all of their supplies.

A committee is set up to organise the community. They share tasks, hunt, grow vegetables and look after each other. Pru becomes part of this community, finally realising that they have a moral responsibility to share what they have with others. When Rick returns, he retreats to The Paddock with Pru and Grace, telling them they have an inner bunker that only he knows about and that they can survive there for at least five years. Pru realises that he is suffering from a mental illness and paranoia.

Rick won't listen to her reasoning that it is a natural disaster, not a government plot to convert the country into a dictatorship. Pru and Grace escape, but Rick locks himself in the bunker where he will stay until years elapse and it reopens automatically.

This novel explores the morality of caring for one's family alone versus supporting and sharing resources with the community in an emergency situation. It also offers interesting insights into human nature in the face of such a life-changing event, and the reaction, structural breakdown and then reformation of society after a disaster. Several of the townspeople are Indigenous Australians and readers are exposed to the Gija language and culture, such as bush foods and medicines.

The chaos that would occur if all electronic equipment were to truly fail due to a solar storm is captured with such terrifying plausibility that the story is sure keep readers captivated and enthralled. Ultimately, there is a note of hope in which the depth of the human spirit is preserved and what is achievable when a people work together to benefit all.

Major themes: survival, doomsday preppers, EMP, suspense, Gijaculture, paranoia, trust, deceit, love, sacrifice, disaster, secrets friendship, family relationships, grief, loss, social breakdown, coming of age, guilt, apocalypse

Content Notes: 1. Language: bloody x 3, bitch x 2, dick x 9, cocksuckers x 1, shit x 20, f**kx8 [p71, 81, 106, 140, 166, 194, 198, 234]. 2. Moderate sexual content. E.g. mention of Pru sharing a past kiss with a boy and a girl [p10], kissing between Pru and Mateo [p75-6, 132, 138, 154], discussion about virginity and sex [p63-4], joke made about penis/boner [p134, 138], brief mention of a condom [p6], 'Keller wants to get into Blythe's pants' [p164], reference to period [p168], Pru walks in on Blythe and Keller sleeping together [p169], Pru finds out Grace and Keller were also sleeping together [p245], Pru and Mateo explore each other's bodies non-graphically [191-2], Blythe needs sanitary products so Pru makes pads [p176-8]. 3. Mateo has two mothers in a same-sex relationship. [p31] 4. Keith has HIV [p152-53]. 5. Non-graphic birth scene [p250]. 6. Brief reference to beer/alcohol [p9, 31]. 7. Moderate violence. E.g. heart attack [p48-9], gun cupboard in The Paddock [p190], Grace shoots Blythe in the stomach and she dies [p217], death by wasp stings [p252-53]. Physical confrontation between Rick and Pru involving a gun

[320-22]. 8. Christian faith and prayer are touched on as a means of asking for help. There is also a reference to fortune telling and spiritual healing[p156].



Recommended Age: 15 years +
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Amelia Westlake

Author: Erin Gough
ISBN: 978-1760127152
Published: 1/4/18
Publisher: Hardie Grant Egmont

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

From Ampersand Prize-winning author Erin Gough comes this ferociously funny romp through an elite private school, and a brilliant feminist hoax that could change – or ruin – everything. Harriet Price has the perfect life: she's a prefect at Rosemead Grammar, she lives in a mansion, and her gorgeous girlfriend is a future prime minister. So when she decides to risk it all by helping bad-girl Will Everhart expose the school's many ongoing issues, Harriet tells herself it's because she too is seeking justice. And definitely not because she finds Will oddly fascinating.

Will Everhart can't stand posh people like Harriet, but even she has to admit Harriet's ideas are good – and they'll keep Will from being expelled. That's why she teams up with Harriet to create Amelia Westlake, a fake student

who can take the credit for a series of provocative pranks at their school. But the further Will and Harriet's hoax goes, the harder it is for the girls to remember they're sworn enemies – and to keep Amelia Westlake's true identity hidden. As tensions burn throughout the school, how far will they go to keep Amelia Westlake – and their feelings for each other – a secret?

>> OUR REVIEW

Harriet is your perfect A+ student–school prefect, star tennis player and academic genius at the prestigious Rosemead Grammar. She is sheltered by her wealth and wilfully ignorant to the injustices occurring at her school.

Wilhemina [or Will to most people] struggles to follow school rules as she is a social/political activist, who fights for the injustices rife at Rosemead. Their worlds barely join at school, until the two meet in detention one afternoon–and Amelia Westlake is born.

Amelia Westlake is the pseudonym behind cartoons that caricature the discriminations at Rosemead Grammar–from teacher lewdness, sexual commentary towards students, staff favouritism and institutional elitism. Essentially, Amelia Westlake becomes the vigilante of Rosemead Grammar–but no one knows who she is.

Will and Harriet soon learn that they have more in common than Amelia Westlake–in fact, they're falling in love. Will shows Harriet to look beyond her comfortable wealth and sheltered life. Harriet teaches Will to overcome her anxieties with compassion and understanding.

However, everything comes to head at the Year 12 Formal, when Amelia Westlake hijacks the event and sets it at The Rocks in a cool underground bar, instead of the

elite venue in Circular Quay that the teachers had planned. The heist is one step too far for the teachers and the Year 12 cohort is sentenced to detention until one of them cracks and tells the truth about who Amelia is.

For hours, solidarity holds out, until Will (in attempt to protect Harriet) announces it was her. This is followed by a chorus of every girl in Year 12 standing up as Amelia Westlake too. Yet, snobbery and favouritism mean that only Will takes the fall for the conspiracy and she is expelled from Rosemead Grammar.

Harriet, finally no longer blind to the exploitation and nepotism of Rosemead, leaves the school behind her. The two girls continue their activism in their own lives, no longer under the shadow of school prestige.

Major themes: love, identity, feminism, sexism, activism, elitism, LGBTQI+

Content Notes: 1. Language: 'prick' x 1, 'bloody' x 4, 'f**k' [p.21, 86, 141, 146, 196, 215, 223, 253, 272, 302, 332], 'shit' x 18, 'hell' x 3, 'crap' x 3 'goddamn' [p.86, 241], 'bastard' x 1, 'bitch' x 7, 'arse' x 2. 2. Lesbian relationships - kissing. [p85, 232] 3. Adultery is mentioned between Will's parents. [p37] 3. Teacher sexualises students verbally. [p146]

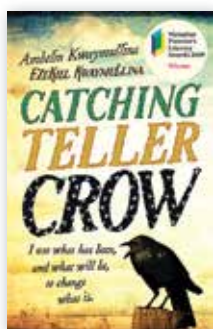


Recommended Age: 15 years +

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Catching Teller Crow

Author:

Ambelin & Ezekiel Kwaymullina

ISBN: 978-1760631628

Published: 29/8/18

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

A totally addictive ghost story, crime story and thriller, told half in prose and half in verse, from two of the most exciting Aboriginal voices in Australia.

>> OUR REVIEW

Beth Teller was just 15-years-old when she was killed in a car accident. Her dad, a police detective, is struggling to deal with her death and Beth—the narrator of the story—is determined to help him.

Following a fire at a children's home, the body of an unidentified male—the only fatality—is found in the ruins. Detective Michael Teller is sent to the small town to investigate. His boss hopes that an uncomplicated case will help him get back on his feet, but the case turns out to be anything but.

Isobel Catching, an indigenous teen, was a resident in the home. Beth is surprised to discover that Isobel can both see and hear her. Until that point, only her father has been able to do so. It is important to Isobel that somebody hears her story, which is primarily told in allegorical verse.

The story builds to a climatic reveal in the final chapter. Those whose job it was to protect the most vulnerable have not only failed to do so, they are actually the perpetrators of the most carefully planned, heinous crime and they've been getting away with it for decades ...

Written by a brother and sister duo, this powerful story has strong themes of injustice, corruption, institutional failings and abuse and highlights the tragic reality that there have been times when communities and authorities have placed a lower value on some lives versus others.

However it also showcases the beautiful strength of indigenous family bonds and intergenerational history [something we rarely hear about but which western family culture could learn a lot from] and the incredible power of storytelling and being heard as a gateway to healing and an instrument for positive change.

Favourite quote: *Their memory of me had become the glue that held everyone together, and I loved them for that. It was as if I, Beth Teller, was holding my family up, and so everything great they went on to do would be a little bit because of me, and a little bit like I was doing it as well.* [p11]

Major themes: grief, loss, family, indigenous culture, corruption, racism, Stolen Generation, abuse, violence, mystery

Content Notes: There are dark themes to this book, but very little detail. In the final chapter it becomes clear that Alexander Sholt, the man who owned the children's home (the Sholts are the richest most powerful family in town) and the local police captain (who had been friends with Sholt since childhood) were torturing and killing girls from

the home in a secret bunker. The people involved [Sholt, the policeman, and the two senior staff at the home who were being paid to keep quiet about what was happening at the home] are killed throughout the story.



Recommended Age: 15 years +
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Girl Running, Boy Falling

Author: Kate Gordon
ISBN: 978-1925563528
Published: 1/10/18
Publisher: Rhiza Press

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Do you ever look at the sky and think that's where we belong? Like maybe the world is the wrong way around and we're meant to be up there, floating? Sixteen-year-old Therese lives in a small town on a small island. Her Aunt Kath calls her Tiger. Her friends call her Resey. The boy she loves calls her Champ. She's a lot of different things for a lot of different people.

Therese has always had her feet on the ground. She's running through high school, but someone in her life is about to fall ...

And when he does, her perfect world falls with him. For the first time in her life, Therese can't stand being on the ground.

Girl Running, Boy Falling is a raw

read about a girl and boy—who are beautifully flawed.

>> OUR REVIEW

Therese [also known as Tiger, Resey and Champ] lives in a small town in Tasmania with her Auntie Kath. Both her parents are absent from her life, but her days are filled with her close-knit group of friends and the boy she loves, Wally. She's a lot of different things for a lot of different people and fills her days to the brim with school, acting, work and football. She makes sure every day is bursting with memories to write down and put in her box, to send away to someone she hasn't seen since she was a baby [readers later find out this person is her mother].

Wally, it turns out, also writes down his world – that he is so full of sadness and emptiness that 'he can't keep going on'. After the best football game of his career – during which a scout spotted him and invited him to Melbourne – Wally seems happy. He jokes and chats, like normal. He generously gives away some of his favourite things – including a guernsey, which he gives Resey, inscribed with one of his favourite poems, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*. Resey is at work when her aunt comes to tell her the tragic news – Wally has taken his own life. And Resey's world crashes down..

Despite the best efforts of everyone around her – her aunt, her school and her friends – Resey feels unable to confront the grief she feels at Wally's death. The only person she wants to be with is Rhino, because he makes her laugh and takes her on adventures, letting her run away.

In the real world – no matter how far or how fast Resey runs, life waits for her: school, work, the friends she has hurt and pushed away, the school musical...

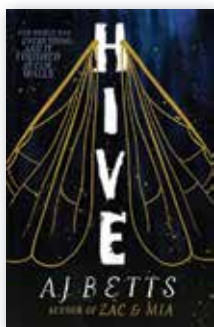
She can't run forever, but she's worried what will happen when she finally stops. Finally, on a trip to Cradle Mountain with Rhino, she confronts her demons and realises that Wally did love her in his own way and she can't keep blaming herself. She returns home to give a resounding performance in the school musical, knowing Wally is watching her. She stops writing letters to her mother, realising she needs to let go. Instead, she writes a letter to Wally.

Major themes: teen suicide, friendship, love, family, resilience, grief, death, community, identity

Content Notes: 1. Wally commits suicide. The story is not focused on that event but on the affect it has on those who loved him. 2. Language: f**k x 3 [p115, 184, 201], shit x 8 [p4, 15, 49, 75, 184, 185, 210, 215], piss x 1 [p79]. 3. The protagonist's best friend Mel is gay.



Recommended Age: 15 years +
Suitable class novel: YES
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Hive

Author: A. J. Betts

ISBN: 978-1760556433

Published: 26/6/18

Publisher: Pan Macmillan

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

All I can tell you is what I remember, in the words that I have. Hayley tends to her bees and follows the rules in the only world she has ever known. Until she witnesses the impossible: a drip from the ceiling. *A drip?* It doesn't make sense. Yet she hears it, catches it. Tastes it. Curiosity is a hook. What starts as a drip leads to a lie, a death, a boy, a beast, and too many awful questions.

Hive is the first in a gripping two-book series by award-winning and international bestselling author A. J. Betts.

>> OUR REVIEW

Our world was everything and it finished at our walls.

This was Hayley's world: a hexagonal collection of rooms that resembled a hive, like her bees lived in. As head beekeeper, she was responsible for keeping bees in her world, with days dictated by changing glow lights and overseen by a distant god whose ways could only be described as mysterious. She knew nothing of strange things like oceans, or birds, or other mythical notions referenced by age-bent uncles and aunts, but what she did know was fear.

Fear of the head pains she strove to hide, in case someone found out and she was forced to receive treatment for her 'madness'. Fear of the worst kind of sin, adultery, which she knew had something to do with a boy and girl being alone together. This was forbidden, unless there was a death in their world. Then a three-day marriage was required of the next in line to produce a child to replace the one called up to be with God. Mothers were a group of carers for babies and belonging was a collective concept centred around the completeness of the world and one's place in it. At least it was, until she found the drip, and met the son...

Hive is a compelling futuristic story of a suboceanic world created for the survival of humankind. Faith is largely crowd-calming superstition to ensure control over the collective population, with a few chosen councillors privy to the brief history of how "the world" began. These details aren't revealed until the end of the book, but there's enough information to deduce this. The writing is excellent and the characters well developed, luring you into their struggles—a story that infects the mind and creates uneasy scenarios that demand a response.

The story is laced with an array of themes probing matters like religion, family structure, relationships, societal roles, death, loss, guilt, superstition, and purpose in a world where those in the upper house know better than anyone because of their closeness to God. When Hayley uncovers one secret after another, most linking back to the peculiar activities of the Judge's son, her place in the world unravels. She's a girl who "looks up" and asks too many questions, the kind of questions the world

simply cannot afford.

The powerful writing in this unique, unsettling work delivers a strong sense of the world. The author skilfully employs point of view and other literary devices throughout. The Australian link revealed near the end of the story is also a nice touch.

Major themes: friendships, marriage, familial relationships, guilt, loss, social order, societal expectations, purpose, religious beliefs

Content Notes: 1. Adultery, being the worse possible sin, is a constant theme. The protagonist doesn't really know what it is, neither does she really know what marriage entails, but understands there is a link between babies and a boy and girl being alone. She'd been warned the wrong type of together led to bad fruit (deformed babies). Through p49-65 this is particularly pertinent as the protagonist has been wrongly accused of adultery by an aged uncle, who dies, and whose death eventually leads to her being the next in line to marry. 2. Sexual references, e.g. (in context of identifying males and females) penis x 1 [p143], breasts x 3 [p153, 157, 161]. A painful pre-marriage internal examination that Hayley doesn't understand leaves her bleeding [p171], Hayley experiences uncertainty over whether or not she's supposed to be naked or wait to be undressed by her new husband, but gets stuck half undressed. (At which point the son arrives to tell her the marriage has been deemed invalid.) [p183-85] 3. Non-graphic description of the butchering of a corpse [p158, 161].

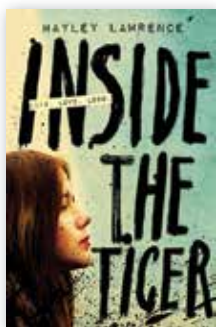


Recommended Age: 14 years +

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Inside The Tiger

Author: Hayley Lawrence

ISBN: 978-0143788959

Published: 3/9/18

Publisher: Random House

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

It's not because Bel's mother was murdered. It's not because her father is a politician. Bel writes to a Death Row prisoner as an easy way out of an assignment. But now he's written back.

Drawn to Micah's world inside a Thai prison, Bel finds herself falling for the boy with ragged hair, shackles and a terrible past. But is she setting herself up for more loss? And will loving him mean losing the people who mean the most to her at home?

>> OUR REVIEW

Bel is the daughter of a politician, a politician who has set his sights on justice and harsher penalties in the justice system. She is sick and tired of being forced to be part of her father's activism cause, all because of her mother's death, and finally she receives the opportunity to break free: boarding school.

One of the first assignments she is given at her new school involves a social cause. Not wanting to follow in her father's footsteps, Bel decides to take a creative approach. She begins to exchange letters with an Australian boy who is incarcerated on Death Row in Thailand.

Micah is guilty of the crime he committed—drug trafficking—and has been sentenced to death. But Bel and Micah begin to fall in love, leaving Bel stuck in the middle of conflicting love triangle.

Eli, whom she has known her whole life is in love with her too. Bel, realising the injustice of the death penalty for Micah, begins to fight it: she creates a YouTube channel, funding pages and organises protests. The media laps up the story and it goes viral.

Bel, along with Eli, decide to go to Thailand to visit Micah. The visit, though it has rocky spots, overall goes well. But Bel is more confused than ever before—she can't deny her feelings for either boy. Eli is furious and the two stop talking ... but Eli could never stop truly loving Bel.

Weeks later Bel receives a letter from Micah, he is distraught because his friend in death row was taken and put to death and he tells her he can't talk to her anymore. Bel is heart-broken and continues to write to him for months, even though she gets no response. After months of shaky friendship, Bel decides to move on and recover her friendship with Eli, even going as far as to take their relationship to the next level.

The story has a heart-wrenching ending with Micah being put to death in the Thai prison despite the media attention and Bel's work to help get justice for him. Bel is heart-broken, but from the ordeal she learns to live life to the fullest, becomes a stronger person and solidifies her relationships with her friends and family. A raw, real and hard-hitting read.

Major themes: death, love, family, politics, activism, love triangle, coming of age, strength, death row, justice system, injustice, grief

Content Notes: 1. Language: 'f*ck' [p191, 320], 'shit' x 2 2. Kissing scene. [p184-186] 3. Sex scene with no description [p317-318] 4. Micah and his friend, Boxer, are executed [p325] 5. The focal point of the story is a prisoner on death row in Thailand for drug trafficking which ends in his execution.



Recommended Age: 15 years +

Suitable class novel: NO

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Liberty

Author: Nikki McWatters

ISBN: 978-0702260292

Published: 29/10/18

Publisher: UQP

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

In 1472, Jeanne's father has arranged her marriage to the French Lieutenant Lagoy against her wishes, but armed forces are swelling outside the stone walls and so Jeanne risks her life to rally the city's women to protect the freedom of her people and perhaps herself.

In 1797, Betsy, a feisty, brave Irish girl, her brother George and best friend, Will, secretly join the rebel army, unbeknownst to her father, hoping to liberate Ireland from the yoke of English rule.

In 1960's Australia, Fiona wants to fit in with her new university friends but her values and convictions are challenged when Luke gets his conscription papers. Will she join the protest

movement and march for peace, in opposition to her family and society?

Liberty is an action-filled account of three women, all living in different times but descended from one female bloodline, who find themselves fighting forces that threaten their freedom.

» OUR REVIEW

The year is 1472, and Jeanne Laisné is a pauper, the daughter of a coward and a highborn woman who married for love. She has grown up wielding twin hatchets and is determined to marry her sweetheart, Colin the chicken farmer. Jeanne has been pursued for some time by Lieutenant Jean Lagoy, a man who disgusts her. When he loses patience, a match is arranged between them by the captain of the militia (against her will). She doesn't have time to decide what to do about this before the army of Charles the Bold attacks her home town of Beauvais.

Jeanne realises that there are not enough men in the town to fight an entire army, and unites the women to fight for their freedom. They repulse the initial wave of the Burgundian forces, and Jeanne earns the moniker of Jeanne Hachette. Colin is captured, and in the process of saving him, Jeanne comes up with a plan to destroy the Burgundian cache of gunpowder and escape. Her plan is successful, but Colin insists that they must return to Beauvais, where Lagoy finds them and arrests Colin for theft.

In a box of her mother's things, Jeanne finds her wedding dress, and a family tree dating back hundreds of years, titled *The Sister Story*. Louis XI visits Jeanne and is moved by her story, so he gives Colin a title and approves their marriage.

The year is 1797, and Betsy Gray is an educated Irish woman with rebel sympathies and a headstrong nature. A game of cat and mouse picks up in intensity as English redcoats close in on the motley rebel band, holding Betsy up in the street and kidnapping or killing revolutionaries and suspected sympathisers alike.

Betsy's sister Brigit has a baby and Betsy's crush on her friend William Boal blossoms into an engagement, but Betsy's brother-in-law is captured by redcoats. Betsy, her brother George, and her fiancé William break Brigit's husband Jimmy out of prison and put them on a boat to Scotland.

Betsy gives Brigit their mother's family tree – *The Sister Story*.

Months later, a group of redcoats discover that Betsy has been helping Will and George hide out in the hills. Betsy goes with them to fight, but they have trouble rousing troops. They lose the battle, and thus, the war. George, Will, and Betsy are killed by redcoats.

It's the 1960s Australia and Fiona McKechnie grew up poor, on a farm in the Darling Downs. She's always dreamed of moving to Brisbane to study Law at university – but once she does, she realises it's nothing like she expected. Fitting in is difficult, and forming an opinion on the changing political landscape is even harder.

Her father sends her a package containing a family tree that dates back at least a thousand years – the same *Sister Story*.

One of her new friends, a boy named Luke, is conscripted. Fiona isn't quite convinced that people should dodge the draft. However, when she goes home to see her family and finds that her brother has also been conscripted, her

position changes.

Fiona takes part in a student protest against the draft and the war, and when the protest goes wrong and she and her friends get arrested, she has no regrets. After the protest, Fiona's father comes to Brisbane and forces her to come home. She goes back to university, achieves excellent marks, and becomes the editor of the student paper.

These three young women are connected across the generations – by their ambition, the shared loss of their mothers, the injustices they face, and most of all by the secret of their bloodline. They feel isolated by their disconnection from their history, but fighting for their causes makes them feel part of something bigger – a revolution as old as humanity.

Interweaving these three narratives into one – Jeanne's revolutionary epic, Betsy's spy thriller, and Fiona's coming-of-age story – is an ambitious project, with varying results. McWatters stays true to the throughline of the story, linking ideas and themes between chapters. However, the rising tension of the separate narratives is undermined by the moving focus; tension rises through each chapter and is cut abruptly short when the next begins. The epic battle scenes of Jeanne's story juxtapose uneasily with Fiona and Betsy's more emotional, cerebral struggles. This same juxtaposition of character is also a great strength: Fiona's awkward innocence contrasts Betsy's confidence, which contrasts Jeanne's realism; as a trio, they are linked by their shared courage and their determination to do the right thing.

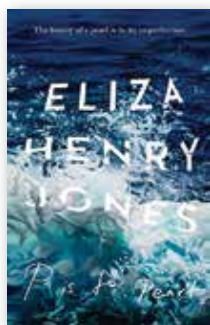
Major themes: family, love, independence, feminism, politics,

war, sexism, oppression

Content Notes: 1. Allusion to rape [p10, 242, 345] 2. Battle scenes containing depictions of violence and death. [p173 - 175, 303] 3. Use of a musket. [p235] 4. Homosexuality. [p288] 5. Death. [p346 - 347] 6. Protagonist gets kicked by a police officer, picked up and thrown in the back of a paddy wagon. [p257]



Recommended Age: 15 years+
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



P is for Pearl

Author: Eliza Henry Jones
ISBN: 978-1460754931
Published: 19/2/18
Publisher: Harper Collins

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Seventeen-year-old Gwendolyn P. Pearson has become very good at not thinking about the awful things that have happened to her family. She has also become used to people talking about her dead mum. Or not talking about her and just looking at Gwen sympathetically.

And it's easy not to think about awful things when there are wild beaches to run along, best friends Loretta and Gordon to hang out with - and a stepbrother to take revenge on. But following a strange disturbance at the cafe where she works, Gwen is forced to confront what happened to her

family all those years ago. And she slowly comes to realise that people aren't as they first appear and that like her, everyone has a story to tell.

» OUR REVIEW

In her home town on the west coast of Tasmania, 17-year-old Gwen is obsessed with running, both literally and figuratively. It seems like everything is triggering her, at home and at school. Gwen's mother was unpredictable, while her stepmother Biddy is the opposite - a fact Gwen both loves and hates.

The backstory is revealed through diary entries interspersed throughout the story. Gwen has a fixed view about what transpired in their family all those years before but as the story progresses she has to face the truth about the loss of her little brother and her mother, and give herself, her father and her step-family the opportunity to be happy again.

Despite the painful backstory, this is an easy and enjoyable read. It touches on the challenges of a family member's mental illness, the ways we avoid facing the truth and the path to discovering who we really are in the aftermath of a tragic loss. There's a light romance woven in and new boy Ben, who is also dealing with challenges within his own family.

This is the author's debut YA novel, originally written when she was just 16-years-old.

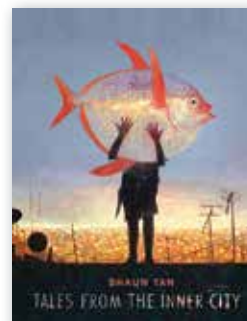
Major themes: grief, loss, friendship, family, restoration, facing your past, mental illness, forgiveness, art, first love, eating disorder

Content Notes: 1. There are a few references to drinking and getting drunk but it's clear that isn't a good thing [p162, 217-223, 255, 260]. 2. Gwen's little

brother drowned in their backyard pool [p227] after their mum got distracted. Her mum falls apart and her dad takes her to stay with Biddy. While they're apart, her mum falls over, cracks her head and dies [p228]. Gwen blames her father and Biddy who she believes were having an affair. That isn't the case. 3. Mau is the only person Gwen can talk to about her mum. She runs a crystal shop and makes a couple of references to auras and ghosts. Gwen sees that as her slightly amusing quirk, and is just glad to have someone to talk to about her mum [p112, 114, 235, 237]. 4. Language: 'wanker' [as an insult] [p32], bloody x 1. 5. Kissing [p223, 283-4, 290].



Recommended Age: 14 years +
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



Tales from the Inner City

Author: Shaun Tan
ISBN: 978-1760523534
Published: 26/9/18
Publisher: Allen & Unwin

» PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Where can we live if not in each other's shadow? World-renowned artist Shaun Tan applies his unique imagination to a reflection on the nature of humans and animals, and our urban coexistence. From crocodile to frog, tiger to bee, this is a dark and surreal exploration of the

perennial love and destruction we feel and inflict - of how animals can save us, and how our lives are forever entwined, for better or for worse. *Tales from the Inner City* is a masterful work, bearing all of Shaun Tan's trademark wit and poignancy in both its prose and exquisite illustrations.

>> OUR REVIEW

At times written in first person, at times in second; often in prose, occasionally in poetry; sometimes from a human's perspective, sometimes from an animal's; at once sermonising and heart- warming, Shaun Tan's latest offering is a sophisticated and richly illustrated collection of writings that form one cohesively themed story. His expansive vocabulary and vivid use of metaphor and simile create an evocative and symbolic literary masterpiece.

This links each story to a sense of inevitability and emotional removal. The often-nameless characters are symbolic and representative of an archetype, elevated beyond the singular or the individual. There is also a constant thread of entropy, of all things eventually returning to dust [or, more appropriately, mud] - of man's fight against nature and the atrocities we commit, and how all they will bring is guilt, and how it is all for naught anyway because nothing lasts.

The text interrogates and abandons a human-centric narrative or perspective, turning man vs. nature on its head. Both inspired and narcissistic, *Tales from the Inner City* is best considered as a work of art.

Major themes: nature, animals, endangered species, extinction, capitalism, consumerism, greed, domestication, history, shark culling, death, family, mortality, greed, class gaps, morality,

justice, co-existence of species

Content Notes: 1. Language: shit x 2 (p83, 85). 2. Throughout the book, the deaths of several animals are detailed. The goriest is the death of a shark (p55-7).

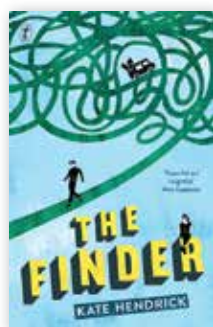


Recommended Age: 12 years to adult

Suitable class novel: YES

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Finder

Author: Kate Hendrick

ISBN: 978-1925603811

Published: 30/7/18

Publisher: Text Publishing

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

When Lindsay meets Elias the signs aren't promising. She's a grungy introvert who doesn't want to talk to anyone. He's a teen fashionista who can't shut the hell up. But since Lindsay tracked down a runaway kid, word's got around that she knows how to find people. And Elias is looking for his birth mother. And he has money, and Lindsay's perpetually broke. So that's how this oddest of odd couples teams up.

But the thing is, Lindsay wasn't actually trying to find the runaway. It's just how she looks at the world. Not idly, like most people, but really looking. Scanning every house, every face, every car. That's because someone is missing in Lindsay's life- her identical twin Frankie, who disappeared when they were

eight. Since then, her parents have kept themselves busy. And angry. And Lindsay has been looking. In Elias, despite their differences, she might have found someone to look with.

>> OUR REVIEW

Lindsay has blamed herself for her twin sister, Frankie's, disappearance for nine years—nine years she has been riddled with guilt, holding all her emotions in and pushing everyone away. However, when Lindsay makes a reputation for herself as 'the finder'—a finder of people, of missing objects, etc.—she is roped into helping a boy called Elias.

Elias is everything that Lindsay is not—bright, bubbly, excited about life and fashionable. Lindsay cannot stand him, but the money is too tempting to give up, so she agrees to help find his biological mother. As the two start to research and dig into who Elias' mother is, Lindsay is dealing with her own issues at home. Her dad does everything he can to avoid being at home and her mum is a crazy control freak who has every second of the day planned for Lindsay and her five younger siblings.

Lindsay and her parents still live in the shadow of Frankie's death but the subject is forbidden in the household: none of Lindsay's younger siblings even know that Lindsay had a twin before they were born. When a big fight breaks out in the house over dinner one night and the children all find out about Frankie, Lindsay decides to run away from home. She takes up residence in an empty house which is up for sale.

During the next week, the hunt pushes onwards as Lindsay continues to help Elias unravel the mystery that is his biological mother, Aurora. After tracking down her family members, talking

to her friends and discovering her possible location, they decide to take an eventful road trip to the bush to find her, but is she really his mother?

Not only does the trip end with Elias finally finding his real mother, but it also prompts Lindsay to finally return home and confront her parents. Lindsay and her mother talk, and Lindsay discovers just how much her mum has been hurting too. Although their relationship is not fully repaired, it does lead Lindsay to realise two things: she isn't the only one who lost someone and that she has to find Frankie.

A moving story about family, loss, grief and perseverance with mystery and suspense that keeps you turning the pages.

Major themes: family, grief, loss, perseverance, friendship, healing, mystery, strength, adventure

Content Notes: 1. Throughout the book Lindsay continually breaks into an empty house in her neighbourhood so she can escape her family and she also sleeps there for about a week. 2. Elias is gay, it is not explored at all, simply just a fact of who he is.

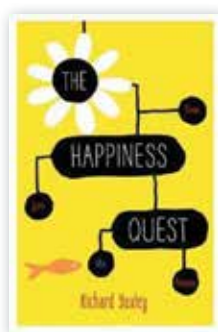


Recommended Age: 14 years +

Suitable class novel: NO

Good read rating: ★★★★★

Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Happiness Quest

Author: Richard Yaxley

ISBN: 978-1742991993

Published: 1/8/18

Publisher: Scholastic

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Tillie Bassett is sad, and she doesn't understand why. Her parents and friends suggest very different, allegedly helpful, remedies. But it is the suggestion of her counsellor, Gilbert the Goldfish, that the answer may lie in finding the nature of happiness. As Tillie embarks upon her project she discovers that, when it comes to family and friends, nothing is quite as it seems. Secrets are uncovered, old tensions resurface, relationships tangle and untangle, and Tillie realises that everyone struggles balancing sadness and happiness, and living truthfully.

>> OUR REVIEW

Tillie Bassett is drowning in sadness. There was nothing specific that caused it, and nothing specific that's going to fix it, despite other people's attempts to find a quick solution.

She is afraid of love, of death, of everything, and isn't sure what came first—the sadness or the fear.

Eventually her mother spots the Happiness Clinic and insists they make an appointment. There she meets Gilbert, who gives her homework—she is to research

happiness, to find out what happiness is, for herself and for others. His premise is that once she understands happiness, she will have a better idea of how to reach it.

In response to her research, Tillie's father writes her a series of letters, expressing the things he hasn't previously said, particularly about his very difficult childhood. Her sister, Rosie, shares her teenage diary with her. A diary filled with angst, particularly over her difficult relationship with Susan [their mother] which contrasts with the happiness she now feels. And ultimately her mother helps her understand that it is important to accept who you are, 'bad parts as well as good'.

But none of them are doing those things—there are family secrets stopping them from moving forward. When Tillie challenges them to resolve their differences, the truth comes out—her mother was an alcoholic [now reformed]. There'd been an incident when Rosie was little and she was hurt. Their mum had been living with that guilt ever since ... With the unveiling of those secrets comes the freedom to learn how to be a family again.

An interesting, gentle but quite profoundly introspective tale of mental health, family secrets and a teenage girl learning to accept who she is.

Favourite quote: "Imperfection is a gift ... I ought to know. I live with it everyday."

Major themes: mental health, healing, family, inner strength

Content Notes: 1. Brief reference to a single event where Macy encouraged Tillie to try her dad's alcohol. When Tillie's mother realised she'd been drinking she became hysterical [the reason later becomes clear as her mother

used to be an alcoholic). 2. Macy tells a [false] story of having been caught up in a school shooting back at her school in Philadelphia. She later admits she just did it to shock Tillie out of her sadness. There was no truth to it. 3. In one scene, Tillie struggles with the temptation to self harm. She pinches herself but successfully fights the urge to cut herself. Then in Part 3, Helena tells Tillie their mutual friend Simone had been cutting herself after losing her faith. Helena had told Simone's mother who told her to butt out. 4. There's a story on the news about a farmer who shot his wife and children before committing suicide. 5. Jed stands up to his stepfather who has been hurting his mum, and his mum kicks him out.



Recommended Age: 13 years +
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



The Things That Will Not Stand

Author: Michael Gerard Bauer
ISBN: 978-1742997582
Published: 1/9/18
Publisher: Scholastic

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Sebastian is at a university open day with his best friend Tolly when he meets a girl. Her name is Frida, and she's edgy, caustic and funny. She's also a storyteller, but the stories she tells about

herself don't ring true, and as their surprising and eventful day together unfolds, Sebastian struggles to sort the fact from the fiction. But how much can he expect Frida to share in just one day? And how much of his own self and his own secrets will he be willing to reveal in return?

>> OUR REVIEW

Four years ago, Sebastian's older brother was killed in a car accident. He was out of control before he died—drugs, crime etc—so 16-year-old Sebastian's parents are always freaking out that he might end up like them ... but nothing could be further from the truth.

In reality Sebastian is a hopeless romantic, thanks to the steady diet of rom-coms he watched with his mum as a little boy. When he bumps into a Perfect Female Human (PFH) at a university open day and is about to make a misplaced grand romantic gesture, a girl named Frida steps in and saves him from making a complete fool of himself. Frida, Sebastian and his best friend Tolly soon hit it off, telling each other nonsense stories and sharing tales of their past. As the day unfolds, it gets better and better, until Sebastian discovers that Frida may not be who she seems and has to choose whether to trust the person he knows her to be or pigeonhole her based on her past, like everyone else has ...

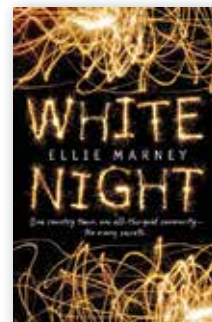
A wonderful, redemptive story with a touch of 'Breakfast Club', from a much loved Australian author. The characterisations are excellent and it is great to see Sebastian and Tolly portrayed as decent guys who choose to make a difference where they can. Very enjoyable.

Major themes: family history, friendship, secrets, romance, theatre sports, redemption

Content Notes: 1. Language: shit x 30, dick x 17, prick x 3, wankers x 1, bastard x 3, Jesus x 3 (p109, 133, 26). 2. When their school won't allow one of the students to bring his male partner to the senior formal, Tolly stages a protest in the playground (p84-85) and is suspended for a week as a result. 3. Frida tells Sebastian about a girl called Karen who was in foster care and had to barricade her bedroom door to 'keep out unwanted visitors' and was used as an ashtray by one of her 'foster pervert dads' (p133). Karen and Frida turn out to be the same person.



Recommended Age: 14 years +
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★



White Night

Author: Ellie Marney
ISBN: 978-1760293550
Published: 21/2/18
Publisher: Allen & Unwin

>> PUBLISHER DESCRIPTION

Bo Mitchell has little on his mind except school, footy and friends. Rory Wild has grown up on a nearby commune and is attending a 'normal' high school for the first time. Bo is determined to find out everything about her, even her secrets...

>> OUR REVIEW

Set in a country town in Victoria, Ellie Marney's *White Night* centres

on high schooler Bo Mitchell and his connection to the new girl, Rory Wild. Rory lives in the reclusive, eco-conscious community called 'Garden of Eden', and before has only ventured into town for absolutely necessary supplies.

As she has been homeschooled for much of her life, high school is a complete culture shock for Rory. She struggles to fit in with her classmates, who find her hippie style of dress and worldview to be odd, but a happenstance meeting with Bo leads to the two forming a friendship.

Bo is introduced to Eden's eco-conscious mode of living—no plastics, subsistence farming, and as little waste as possible. Open-minded Bo is drawn in by these ideas, and while he draws closer to Rory, he remains wary of the influence of Eden's charismatic leader, Ray. Eden, we find, is under investigation for endangering the welfare of children and is under close scrutiny from the government and local community alike.

Bo, meanwhile, is struggling to choose between two school subjects: PE—given his father's hopes of him pursuing a career in football—and cooking, which he enjoys and excels at. In the midst of his own internal conflict, Bo's home life is complicated when Liam appears on the Mitchell's doorstep. A shocking secret is revealed—Bo has an older brother his father has never told him about. Through this conflict, Bo comes to understand more about his relationship with his father and his family.

The story culminates at the 'White Night' fundraising event. The local teenagers are using the light-show to raise money to repair their local skate park, unaware of the term's link to the Jonestown mass-suicide. Echoing

this event, Bo rushes to Eden to check on Rory, finding that Ray has convinced the remaining community that mass suicide is the only way to make a statement against those that oppose him. Rory defies Ray and ends up in the care of another surviving Eden resident, and together they aim to build green community housing for the town.

Readers will enjoy the particularly Australian flavour to the novel, with its rural setting and use of Australian vernacular. Its focus on family and community are a particular credit, along with Marney's attention to writing complex, fleshed-out characters. Teenage readers are sure to enjoy the focus on environmentalism, friendships, and relationships.

Major themes: family, environmentalism, gender, community

Content Notes: 1. Language: 'shit' x 69, 'f*ck' x 39, 'dick' x 3, 'arse' x 6, 'bitch' x 2, 'hell' x 2, 'Jesus Christ' x 21, 'God' x 2, 'bastard' x 1. 2. Some mild kissing scenes between Rory and Bo. 3. Eden resident Sally, who is terminally ill, takes her own life. [p354] 4. There is a mass suicide of the Eden residents. [p345-347] 4. There was an underage relationship between Bo's father and his foster sister which resulted in a child. 5. Sprog's brother attacks him, and there is an insinuation of domestic violence in his home life. [p259] 6. Lozzie, whom Bo previously dated, admits to liking Rory and wanting to date other girls [p271]



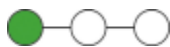
Recommended Age: 16+
Suitable class novel: NO
Good read rating: ★★★★★
Literary value rating: ★★★★★

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