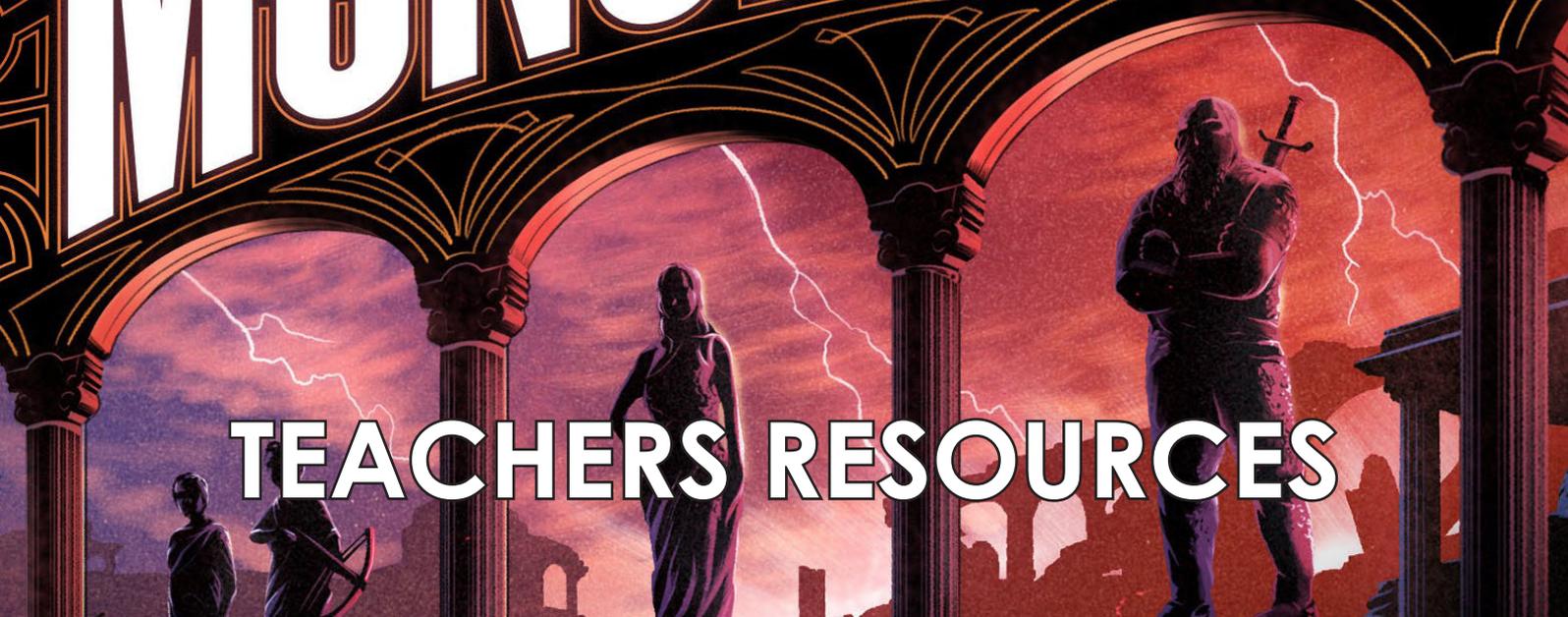




WILL KOSTAKIS
MONUMENTS



TEACHERS RESOURCES

WILL KOSTAKIS MONUMENTS

Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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INTRODUCTION

'The gods built the world and now we have the power to change it,' he says. 'Think of all the injustices we can set right and the inequalities we can repair. People will listen to us. We're gods.' (p 174)

When Connor Giannopoulos discovers Darroch, a Monument (or god), in a 'sanctuary' or secret chamber under his posh private high school, Charlton Grammar, he doesn't have any idea how much his life is going to change forever. It turns out that immortality and strength beyond his wildest dreams is a bit more responsibility than he had bargained for.

Sixteen-year-old Connor is trying to avoid his ex-best friend, Olly, when he stumbles upon a trapdoor to the chamber. But when Sally Rodgers breaks into the same secret chamber looking for an ancient being, things take an unexpected turn . . . and Connor's life will never be the same again.

Along with the mysterious Sally and, later on, his new friend Locky, Connor discovers the Monuments – gods who have been buried for generations – who created the world and hid themselves away from humanity to keep everyone safe. But now they're exposed and vulnerable, and Connor isn't sure who, himself included, can be trusted with the knowledge and the power these gods have. To make things worse he discovers that Sally has a secret agenda and has lied to Darroch about the danger he's in.

Layers of history merge in this novel about a contemporary teenager's personal family and friendship history, and his encounter with the Monuments, a group of gods whose history must be appeased. Via complicated plotting, the novel reels you in to its emotional core. For this is in fact a deeply felt tribute to the power of family, and particularly to the grandfather whom Connor feels he has abandoned. Via the intervention of his new powers he is able to redeem himself and to move forward in the knowledge that he has paid tribute to a life worth celebrating.

Connor has also learned the value of true friendship and to trust his own instincts in dealing with a series of challenges. He's learned to tackle his problems rather than to avoid or run away from them. His future looks a lot more confident and he knows now that he's up for any challenge that might confront him.

Monuments is the first book in an exciting new duology from YA star Will Kostakis.

BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?
- After you have read the novel, read about *Monuments* in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Studies of Society and Environment, and English Language and Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT (SOSE)

FAMILY TIES

KEY QUOTE: 'They are already here. Life is wondrous like that,' Jivanta says. 'You are your parents. You grew from them. You are every lesson they taught, every story they told and every secret they shared. Wherever you go, you carry them with you. But know that ultimately the path is yours. Do not let your attachment to them lead you somewhere you do not want to go.' (p 158)

DISCUSSION POINT: Discuss the quote above in relation to Connor's relationship with his divorced parents.

DISCUSSION POINT: 'I don't know what makes me think of Pappou, but I do. It must be Darroch's vibe. He has the air about him of someone who's been around a long time. His words have weight. I could never understand the things Pappou would tell me, but judging by the way my distant cousins flocked to him for advice, his words had weight too. Once, anyway.' (pp 39–40) What can we learn from our elders? Discuss Connor's statement here and compare to students' experiences with their grandparents.

DISCUSSION POINT: Connor hasn't visited Pappou for a year but on the night that Darroch dies he finds himself near the Sacred Heart Nursing Home. He later time travels and spends years by his bedside. Discuss the two quotes below and what they suggest about his and his mother's feelings for his grandfather:

'Pappou's inside somewhere. Mum made sure I saw a lot of him growing up. He was a god to her and I think she wanted him to be the same for me. He knew everything.' (p 97)

'All this time, I thought we just forgot about him. We were too busy. That's not the truth – we stopped visiting on purpose. He was a god to Mum and that's how she wanted to remember him, how she wanted me to remember him. But the memories I've made these past six years aren't bad. Sure, Pappou's changed a lot since I was a kid, but he's still my grandfather. And nobody deserves to be ignored because they might be painful to remember. Pappou was there when I entered this world and I should try my hardest to be there when he leaves.' (pp 248–249)

DISCUSSION POINT: 'That's what she meant by considering this a rebirth – abandoning everything I know, everyone I care for. The idea feels terrifying and terrible. The full weight of it presses against my chest. The picture of my life made infinitely better by being a god is replaced with that life vanishing entirely. I'll be hidden in some underground sanctuary like the others forever. I can't breathe.' (p 104) Connor realises how much he cares for his family when confronted by the prospect of never seeing them again. Discuss with students how they would feel in Connor's situation.

SEXUALITY

KEY QUOTE: 'The gown starts with a sweetheart neckline – for some reason Mum was surprised when I came out of the closet – and the white fabric crosses over at the front and then falls from her waist to the floor.' (p 59)

DISCUSSION POINT: 'I wasted too much time thinking there was a part of me I couldn't telegraph, that I shouldn't share. I would rework that.' (p 173) Locky's admission to Connor is typical of how some young people are forced to hide their real feelings in fear of others' judgments. Why should 'coming out' be so difficult?

DISCUSSION POINT: Discuss with students the honest and open attitudes that Connor and Locky have towards their sexuality.

MORALITY

KEY QUOTE: 'You lied to him, and then you asked me to tag along! Have you ever read a religious text? Gods do not take kindly to betrayal.' (p 65)

DISCUSSION POINT: Alek laments his personal failure: 'I neglected to tell her that she would die when I received those notes. I could have woken her to warn her, but I didn't. I was ashamed – those notes were proof that I would fail her. She had entrusted me to be her Guardian. It was my duty to keep her safe and I didn't.' (p 200) How difficult can it be to live up to one's sense of duty?

DISCUSSION POINT: A lot of Connor's decisions are founded on his morals and beliefs. What moral qualities does he evince in this novel?

DISCUSSION POINT: This novel is about teenagers being asked to take on extraordinary powers and the personal conflict between responsibility for the welfare of others and one's individual wants and needs. Is it, therefore, a metaphorical account of the same dilemma faced in ordinary life?

GRIEF

KEY QUOTE: 'She lost both parents, and now that she can't resurrect them, it's like she's lost them again. I can't even begin to imagine what that feels like, and I tell her so.' (p 265)

DISCUSSION POINT: How does Sally's grief over the loss of her parents fuel the quest she has enlisted Connor in?

DISCUSSION POINT: Connor's mother feels guilty for not visiting her father, but aren't her actions really driven by her grief over his decline?

FRIENDSHIP

KEY QUOTE: 'This is my first friend divorce, so forgive me if I'm doing it wrong.' (p 1)

DISCUSSION POINT: This novel begins and ends with Connor's feelings about his now ex-best friend, Olly. The adventures he embarks upon show him both that he has his own inner strength and that true friendship is very different from the nostalgic affection he has for Olly. Discuss the evolution of childhood friendships as we experience young adulthood.

DISCUSSION POINT: Apart from the romantic attraction between them, what makes Locky such a good friend for Connor?

PRIVILEGE VERSUS LACK OF PRIVILEGE

KEY QUOTE: 'The whole concept of a debutante ball is so old-fashioned, so ELC. I always feel like I've had to step into a wardrobe to get here,' he says. 'Every posh school has this Narnia vibe – they're fantasy worlds that are trapped in the past, where the magic is money and I'm just a mortal. I never feel like I belong.' (p 81)

DISCUSSION POINT: 'South of the Harbour Bridge, ELC girls are renowned for their dizzyingly rich parents, hyphenated surnames and allergies to travelling south of the Harbour Bridge. The campus must be pretty close to paradise with a name like Eden. Somewhere beneath it, there's a god waiting to be discovered.' (p 52) What aspects of private schooling does this novel question?

DISCUSSION POINT: When Connor and Locky visit Greater Western High School they are visiting the antithesis of what Charlton Grammar and Eden Ladies' College are in terms of physical facilities and attitudes. What hints are there about the differences between them?

DISCUSSION POINT: Read other novels that question some of the attitudes promoted in private schools, eg. Alice Pung's *Laurinda* (2014) or Fiona Wood's *Cloudwish* (2015).

COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE

KEY QUOTE: 'Locky wished he could remix parts of his life, do them over and make them better. Here I am, in the past and I can't change a thing. There's only one timeline and all of my experiences are set in stone.' (p 241)

DISCUSSION POINT: Both Connor and Locky are maturing, although the latter is two years older. How do they each develop or change in the course of this novel?

DISCUSSION POINT: 'I'll be the first to admit I love the sound of my own voice. I'm always itching to say something, to fill in any silence with my cleverness. But it's different with Locky – I'm compelled to ask him questions and listen. I love the sound of his voice too.' (pp 125–6) Is learning to listen to the views of others an essential part of growing up?

DISCUSSION POINT: 'There is no peace in running. I see that now, at the end. A life spent running is not one lived.' (p 94) Connor learns to overcome his personal fears when he is confronted by much larger ones. Can seemingly ordinary people find resources of bravery when confronted with uncommon challenges?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

Study the writing style employed in this narrative, and examine the following sub-topics:

NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

DISCUSSION POINT: This novel is told in the first person, present tense voice of Connor. How might it have changed had it been written in third person? Choose a passage and try to rewrite it in that way.

SYMBOLISM

DISCUSSION POINT: The gods each have a natural element attached to their powers, eg. fire, ice etc. What other symbolism did you identify in this novel?

LITERACY DEVICES

ACTIVITY: Find examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below to identify examples.

Simile	<p>'the woman – a human-sized corsage with a voice like sharpening knives – assesses their attire and makes last-minute adjustments.' (p 67)</p> <p>'He looks like the guys on the packaging for underwear value packs and I look like a skinny soft serve that's a little melted.' (p 207)</p> <p>'The man – dressed like the midpoint between a lumberjack and hipster barista' (p 67).</p>
Metaphors	
Personification	
Other	

HUMOUR

DISCUSSION POINT: Humour throughout the novel is conveyed by employing literary devices such as exaggeration and sarcasm, eg. 'Prefects are incentivised with gift vouchers and co-curricular credits, so the school has an army of pubescent monsters willing to improve their standing by throwing younger kids under the bus. There's no appealing to a prefect's better nature – it's impossible to compete with the allure of a gift voucher.' (p 16) Identify humorous techniques used in this novel, and add relevant quotes to the following table:

Sarcasm	'Finn's smile fades. "That was a Guardian? No wonder we're in strife."' (p 219)
Irony	'I never pegged myself for the type to make grand sacrificial gestures, and yet here I am, grandly sacrificing.' (p 217) 'No, that was confidence, not foresight. We will step back through the portal and close it, trapping him here to die.' (p 227)
Satire	'Larissa Pung,' she says, shaking my hand. 'I'm the founder and de facto leader of the Monument Guardian Support Group. I'm Finn's Guardian, and obviously a bit of a fangirl – hence the blue.' (p 116) 'She found Tash, Aiden's Guardian, and Bevan, Darroch's. The three of them now meet on the first Tuesday of every month – for smoothies on the beach or hikes or rock climbing.' (pp 116–7)
Exaggeration	
Black Humour	
Other	

STRUCTURE

The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention, to shape the work, and to develop themes:

a) *Strong beginnings and endings to chapters* are one way of structuring a narrative, for example:

Beginning: 'I wake up with a start – doona bunched by my feet, fitted sheet drenched with sweat.' (Ch 10, p109)

Ending: 'She tells me the date: 31 March 2014. It's six years ago.' (Ch 22, p 236)

DISCUSSION POINT: Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

b) *Suspense is the key to any narrative's structure.* This contains many '*twists in the plot*', for example:

'I'm having trouble wrapping my head around all this. "Why exactly are you looking for the Monuments if they're not in danger? You're a Guardian, you're supposed to protect them."' (p 63) OR the revelation that Sally's next door neighbour Grace is actually her mother (p 236) is another 'twist'.

DISCUSSION POINT: Which other plot details were particularly suspenseful?

c) *Structure can also be used to cement themes in a work.* For example, this novel begins and ends with Connor at the top of a building, in chapters which '*bookend*' the novel in terms of thematic development. He begins on the roof at Charlton Grammar:

Ch 1: 'I tape the packet of almonds back inside the bell. While I'm up here, I look over to the city again. In however many years, when I'm in one of those skyscrapers, Charlton Grammar will be a speck in the distance. I'll have new friends and a new life. I won't remember the taste of the glue we used in kindergarten, and this won't hurt as much. I'm sure of it.' (p 17)

He ends in the boardroom on the sixty-fourth floor of a skyscraper:

Ch 27: 'The wall is all window. Sydney stretches out for miles, an incomplete connect-the-dots of roads and blinking lights. I try to find Charlton Grammar and a memory elbows its way to the front of my mind – me, six years ago, staring out at the city from the top of Founders Block.' (pp 276)

DISCUSSION POINT: How has Connor changed from where he begins, to where he ends, in these two sections?

SETTING

DISCUSSION POINT: Description in setting can be evoked via a complex range of literary devices which can '*suggest*' without overtly outlining the writer's meaning. Read these two passages and identify what the description suggests about Greater Western High

School, and a local park: 'I pull up a pixelated satellite image of GWHS on my phone. The school is bounded by a fence of black bars that are twice our height and just far enough apart that I can squeeze a hand holding a phone through. I angle the screen upwards and ask them to point out the crypt.

'From above, the school resembles a snowflake on a concrete slab. There's a white building at its centre – the boarding school that became the public school – with demountable classrooms attached to accommodate growing enrolment numbers. They were probably intended to be temporary and now stretch the meaning of the word; their white paint has splintered and their supporting beams have rusted over.' (p 130)

'There's a small park tucked between two near-identical houses, like a third one was bulldozed to make way for it. With some play equipment, a single wooden bench and a patch of grass barely larger than your average nature strip, it's a park that's doing the absolute least.' (p 262)

DISCUSSION POINT: Which location in this novel was most vividly described for you?

DISCUSSION POINT: Setting can also give an indication of the lives of characters, for example, when Connor travels back in time he describes his own house: 'I step over the threshold and the layout's completely different. The Great Furniture Halving of 2015 and the Great Extension of 2016 haven't happened yet, so there's more crammed in less space. The old kitchen is tucked in the corner where Mum's ergonomic workstation is set up in 2020.' (p 240) What does this tell you about his family?

GENRE

DISCUSSION POINT: This is in part a **contemporary rite of passage novel** exploring teenage sexuality, family relationships and friendship. But it is also an **adventure**, and a **fantasy** in which the characters are engaged in an epic quest which includes time travel. The conventions of these three genres are merged in a very humorous and yet also thoughtful way: 'Look, it's easy to romanticise the idea of time travel, but if we boil it down to its essence, what is it? One minute you're standing between two commercial dumpsters behind a discount chemist, relishing the heady aromas of bin juice and decaying meat products, and the next you're still in an alleyway, the smells are still weird, only now it's 1938.' (p 201) Discuss the tropes of these three genres and how the author has employed them in this novel.

DISCUSSION POINT: Fantasy relies on the creation of a credible secondary world, eg. The Guardians speak a language called 'Wren' (p 118) but can understand and speak human language as well.

- Sally explains the Monuments in detail (pp 34–5).
- Darroch describes his fellow Monuments: 'Jivanta is wise, far wiser than me. She is the mother of all that live and breathe in this world, the creator of life. Nuo has a sharp wit and no patience for fools. She is loyal, reliable, but prone to cheating when one turns their back on her during a contest. Aiden is fiery and sometimes reckless. He is driven by his passions whereas Finn is calmer, more measured,' Darroch says. 'We are an unconventional family, and as dangerous as Movements are, it will be wonderful to see them again.' (p 40)

- Sally describes how they came to Australia: 'We can find out for you, don't worry,' she adds. 'The Guardians who brought the Monuments to Australia were Cottle, McLean, Miller, Orwell and Tyrell. Jasper Orwell was my however-many-greats great grandfather. He was the one who decided to put the Monuments under schools. He believed education could make gods of us all. Tash had to research her ancestry; she's a Cottle. Bevan's a Tyrell. That was easy because his surname is still Tyrell. You're either a Miller or a McLean. And you're the last Guardian.' (p 118)
- Connor and Locky are able to travel through time.

What other aspects of this 'secondary world' were revealed in the novel?

CHARACTERS

Major Characters: Connor Giannopoulos (narrator); his mother; Pappou (Constantine, his grandfather); Sally Rodgers (a fake Guardian); Darroch (a Monument/God); Lachlan/Locky Joy (Connor's new friend); Jivanta (a Monument/God); Aidan (a Monument/God); Finn (a Monument/God); Alektos (Jivanta's son and Guardian).

Minor Characters: Ms Rowsey; Pete, a pizza delivery guy (a Hound); debutantes and their partners at Eden Ladies' College; Nina and Casey (Greater Western High School students); Violet Olsen-Smythe (Locky's friend); Larissa Pung (Finn's Guardian and founder and de facto leader of the Monument Guardian Support Group; Grace and Travis (Sally's parents); and Olly (Connor's childhood friend).

ACTIVITY: Draw up a character chart and find key quotes which give a clear picture of any of these characters, and isolate events that demonstrate their natures. Then write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.

DISCUSSION POINT: Which character was most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about?

DISCUSSION POINT: The dialogue in this novel is imbued with very contemporary language and references, eg. 'I try social media, because if I've learnt anything from grown adults uploading five-minute videos about their bowel movements, it's that there's nothing humans won't share in the hope of going viral. Surely some loose-lipped protector of the gods is sharing secrets and using hashtags appropriately.' (p 113) How well does this novel reflect contemporary teenage language and behaviour, in your opinion?

WRITING TASKS

ACTIVITY: Write a diary entry as if written by Locky about meeting Connor.

ACTIVITY: Imagine another Monument with special powers. Give him/her a name and write a brief description of how this god looks and acts.

ACTIVITY: This is the first book in a duology. Imagine what might happen in the second book? Write a synopsis for that novel.

VISUAL LITERACY

ACTIVITY: Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

ACTIVITY: Design a new cover for this book.

ACTIVITY: Create a book trailer for this novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'My experience with gods is limited to the Greek Orthodox church services my grandparents dragged me to as a kid, the names Mum takes in vain, and the photos our school rowing champion Brent Ahmadi uploads online with the hashtag #god.' (p 38) What does Connor's joke suggest about the role of religion in contemporary teenage life?
2. 'There is an appreciation for all things that only comes with the knowledge that life will definitely end.' (p 107)
3. 'Sometimes,' Jivanta says, pushing off the lounge chair, 'it is best to pass on power to those who do not want it.' (p 107)
4. Locky says to Connor: 'The dream is to be the first Aboriginal person to lead the country, but that's a depressing dream.' (p 127) Then he explains what he means. Discuss.
5. 'Movements are interesting times,' he tells me. 'Yes, every second we are aboveground, we are in danger, but we are also *alive*.' (p 154)

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. **Compare this novel to other young adult novels in which the characters travel through time.** Create a class display of other books in which time travel occurs. [See websites under **Bibliography** below.]
2. **Read other fantasy novels in which a young protagonist is given some extraordinary power or destiny** and compare to this one, eg Jessica Townsend's *Nevermoor* (2017) and *Wundersmith* (2018). Create a class display of other books in which such powers are gifted to a character(s).
3. **Design a poster to advertise this book.**
4. What other **title** might the book have had?
5. Locate and discuss **poetry that deals with teenage sexuality** using websites such as: 'Gender and Sexuality: Poems for Teens' *Poets.org*
<<https://poets.org/text/gender-and-sexuality-poems-teens>>

CONCLUSION

‘‘We are gathered here to commemorate the life of Alektos, son of Jivanta,’ I begin, and as soon as I have, I realise this is my chance to right a wrong and give the other gods a proper farewell. ‘We also pay our respects to Darroch, Jivanta, Finn, Nuo, and Aiden, not so much. I don’t know where gods go when they die, but I hope you’re at peace.’

We stand over Alek, and it really sinks in that the Monuments have left the world to us. We are the new gods.

I feel Locky’s hand grip mine. I reach out to grip Sally’s.

I’m not at all certain that we can defeat the rebel gods, and I think that means we just might.’ (p 280)

So ends this novel with a promise of more to come in a sequel. Will Connor, Locky and Sally be able to defeat the rebel gods, and finish the job that the Monuments began?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Will Kostakis is an award-winning author for young adults. As a high school student, Will won *Sydney Morning Herald* Young Writer of the Year for a collection of short stories. His first novel, *Loathing Lola*, was released when he was just nineteen, and his second, *The First Third*, won the 2014 Gold Inky Award. It was also shortlisted for the Children’s Book Council of Australia Book of the Year and Australian Prime Minister’s Literary Awards. *The Sidekicks* was his third novel for young adults, and his American debut. It was included in the IBBY Honour List 2018.

See his website for further information <http://willkostakis.com/>

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‘Booklist: Time Travel Reads for Teens’ *The Hub* April 6, 2016

<<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2016/04/06/booklist-time-travel-reads-for-teens/>>

'Gender and Sexuality: Poems for Teens' *Poets.org*
<<https://poets.org/text/gender-and-sexuality-poems-teens>>

'Popular YA Time Travel Books' *GoodReads*
<<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/ya-time-travel>>

OTHER NON-FICTION AND WEBSITE TEACHING RESOURCES:

'Book Trailers' *Insideadog*
<<http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>>

'Book Trailers for Readers' by Michelle Harclerode <<http://www.booktrailersforreaders>>

'Book Trailers – Resources: Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network'
<<http://idtl.net.au/book-trailers.php>>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award.