

**A
WALK
IN THE
DARK**

JANE GODWIN

TEACHERS RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

‘Rain!’ someone groaned. But Johan said, ‘Listen, it’s just a walk in the dark. That’s all it is. A walk in the dark! And it won’t even be completely dark, because of the supermoon. Too easy for you. A supermoon is thirty per cent brighter than a regular full moon.’” (p 44)

This is a gripping and suspenseful rite-of-passage novel about five teenagers and one night that will change them all, from award-winning author Jane Godwin.

The Year Nines from Otway Community School set out on an overnight hike, into the forest, with no adults. But doesn’t Johan, their head teacher, know that a storm is coming?

None of these five young people is aware what the night will bring. Each will have to draw on their particular strengths to survive. Each will have to face the unknown, battling the elements, events beyond their control, and their own demons. It’s a night that will change everything.

Set in the rainforest of Victoria’s Otway Ranges, *A Walk in the Dark* is about friendship, trust, identity and family, consent and boundaries, wrapped in a compulsively readable, suspense-filled adventure.

‘They hadn’t gone far into the forest, but already he felt brave and glad they were just five kids on their own. ‘There’s something great about being in charge of ourselves,’ he said. ‘Don’t you reckon?’ (p 61)

Five head into the forest, but will all five make it out?

BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the lovely 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 it in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Humanities & Social Sciences (HASS), Science and English Language and Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

Several themes are relevant to the following Curriculum Area: <<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>>

COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE

Key Quote: ‘Ash couldn’t explain it, but something in him felt that might be true. Sometimes he did feel a bit . . . blocked. Like to himself. He didn’t totally feel that he knew who he was. He adjusted his senses to the situation he was in. Ash’s parents seemed to know who they were. It was like their place in the world was doing good deeds. They were such good people . . . Sometimes he felt the urge to do something his parents wouldn’t like, but he didn’t even know what that was. And they’d probably understand, even if he did.’ (p 200)

Discussion Point: Each of these teenagers learn new things about themselves and each other. Discuss what they each learn about themselves.

Discussion Point: What is the likely future of each of these five teenagers? What can you predict of their future choices from the end of this novel?

Discussion Point: ‘That’s the thing about life, she often thought. Basically you’re on your own.’ (p 134) Is Elle right about this?

EDUCATIONAL THEORIES

Key Quote: ‘Johan always spoke like this. Open-ended. At Fred’s last school everything was an instruction, and a punishment. Consequences for your Actions. Do this or you’ll get a detention. Do that or an email will go to your parents. A PBR. Positive Behaviour Reminder. Teacher-speak for ‘Your kid’s a pain in the neck’. Kids called it your Personal Bullshit Record. Two PBRs equals an email sent home. Three PBRs equals one detention. Anyway, it turned out Fred didn’t need to tell the Year Fives much at all, most of them knew how to chop wood better than he did.’ (pp 19–20)

Discussion Point: How effective are Johan’s theories of education? What is positive or negative about them, in your opinion?

Discussion Point: Was the school correct to send these children into the wilderness? Was the potential loss of their equipment or the storm something which could have been prepared for or considered more carefully?

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Key Quote: ‘In the past, if Elle had a best friend at school, sooner or later their family would pack up and leave, or Elle and her family would leave. It always hurt. Elle had learnt to keep a part of herself to herself. For her own protection. Laila was as close to a best friend as Elle

would let herself have.’ (p 21)

Discussion Point: Elle’s mother works for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade so she has worked in many countries and Elle has had to learn to adapt to new schools and classmates. How difficult is it to make friends in such circumstances?

Discussion Point: What other changes are each of the five characters in this novel confronting?

FAMILIES & PARENTING

Key Quote: ‘Fred rolled his eyes. But then how would it be to really admire your father. He let himself imagine that, just for a moment. It’d make your life so much easier, like you had a path to follow, or something.’ (p 28)

Discussion Point: ‘What was his problem? Only that both his parents had given him away, left him for new-model families.’ (p 84) Fred feels that his parents have abandoned him for their new lives and families. How easy is it to adapt to becoming part of a new family or families? How might parents assist their children in such new circumstances?

Discussion Point: ‘It had been a while since someone had spoken to Ash like this, he wasn’t used to being on the alert. It never bothered his friends when he lived up north, and from how Ash saw it, they all seemed to have lots of adults around them who were like their parents. Other people were curious, some seemed almost envious, as if he’d be able to get away with anything. Laila knew, his friends at school all knew, they had other friends with same-sex parents.’ (pp 82–3) Ash hasn’t been subject to comments about his same-sex parents before but he replies calmly to Fred’s sarcasm. What did you think of his reply? How might you have responded to Fred’s attitude?

Discussion Point: From what is written about them in the novel, how would you describe the parents of each of these five characters?

LEADERSHIP

Key Quote: ‘In class, they’d talked about leadership, about how different leaders around the world had dealt with the pandemic. Elle thought Jacinda Ardern was the best. She remembered the three things they’d discussed – empathy, direction, meaning. And demonstrating resilience.’ (pp 57–8)

Discussion Point: Everyone agrees that Elle should be the group leader, given her many practical and intellectual skills but she realises that the task is not as easy as she’d thought: ‘And something dawned on Elle, something no one had ever told her in the leadership courses – that resilience can be a double-edged sword.’ (p 241) What does she mean by this?

Discussion Point: When she admonishes Fred for bringing cans of alcohol and insists that he leave them behind, she unwittingly creates a further problem when he also leaves behind the rest of the contents of his bag, the essential supplies they need, such as torches. How often does discipline result in unforeseen consequences?

FRIENDSHIPS & RELATIONSHIPS

Key Quote: ‘She knew that when Laila had broken up with Joe, he had photos of her, too –

photos that he'd asked her to take, and that he had taken. Laila had never shown them to Elle, but she'd told her about them, and she worried what he might do with them now that they'd broken up.' (p 72)

Discussion Point: Trust is an essential part of forming a relationship. Laila has lost trust in Joe but Ash proves to be the sort of person she can trust. Why?

Discussion Point: Elle is initially annoyed both by Chrystal and by Fred. How and why does her relationship with each of them change by the end of this novel?

FEMALE BODY IMAGE

Key Quote: 'Chrystal hadn't mentioned looks before. Hers or anyone else's. Elle presumed she didn't care, because Chrystal hardly ever showered or brushed her hair. She wore no make-up and didn't seem interested in clothes. What did ugly even mean, anyway? Once you got to know a person, their looks adapted to how you thought of them. On Instagram, all beautiful meant was skinny, suntanned and symmetrical. (pp 136–7)

Discussion Point: 'That's a compliment, isn't it?' said Ash. 'Easy on the eye?' Elle didn't want to explain to Ash why it didn't feel like a compliment. It felt like you weren't offending someone with the way you looked. But that it would be your fault if you were. Like it's your responsibility to be easy to look at. All the body image talks, the books about being proud of your body, would they ever make a difference?'

(p 178) What do you make of the expression 'easy on the eye'? Is Elle correct to be unsettled by it?

MASCULINITY

Key Quote: "But behind this, Ash felt . . . what? 'I'm as scared of those guys as you were,' he told Laila. Maybe more scared, he thought. Like Elle had said, they were toxic. He hated men like that, hated that phrase, toxic masculinity. As if everything a male touched turned to poison. Like the Midas touch, except the opposite. 'Yeah, but you'll never be as vulnerable, like in your body,' Laila was saying. 'That someone could hurt you, that it could always happen.' (p 179)

Discussion Point: Discuss concepts of masculinity and how they affect interactions between women and men.

Discussion Point: Fred's dad has a bad habit of calling him blind Freddy, because of his tendency to daydream. How debilitating is it when a father derides a son like this?

Discussion Point: Sean, one of the four young men in the Hilux ute, harasses the teenagers and threatens them with violence, although his mates are clearly dubious. How much of such male behaviour is a 'performance' to impress his peers?

Discussion Point: 'Well, I used to worry sometimes that there was no one to teach me what a man is.' Laila stopped, let go of his hand. 'Is that what a dad's supposed to do?' Ash laughed. 'I dunno. But now I don't think I need a male parent to turn me into a man. I just need to become who I am. Myself. Like, I don't know, a human.'

(p 215) Discuss Ash's explanation to Laila regarding how he has resolved this conundrum as the child of single-sex parents.

TRAUMA

Key Quote: 'Elle hadn't thought of it that way. She thought Chrystal sometimes seemed sad, but Fred? More like angry. Still, sadness can sometimes look like anger. And the other way around, too. Chrystal seemed so indifferent; her eyes often looked vacant. But what if they weren't vacant, what if they were trying to adjust? To what she was seeing, feeling.' (p 189)

Discussion Point: 'Did you say rain damage?' Rain fell. 'Mmmmmmm brain damage.' Chrystal repeated it. 'Brain damage. His heart couldn't pump blood to his brain, resulting in brain damage.' (pp 170–1) Chrystal's secret trauma is the severe debilitation of her father due to a natural disaster. Her attachment to her Snoopy dog toy, odd silences, and constant humming are not only the result of her tinnitus but also of trauma. Is attachment to certain routines or objects useful, or is it a way of avoiding confronting trauma?

Discussion Point: How sensible was it of her family to send Chrystal away as an exchange student? Did this distance have the potential to heal or might it have exacerbated her trauma?

Discussion Point: Fred is not coping with his family's disintegration and his anger is the way he expresses this trauma. Is anger a useful or cathartic emotional response to trauma? Or is it destructive?

Discussion Point: 'This happened in Stockholm when I lived there, like four years ago. These children, they were refugees and being sent back to their country by the Swedish government.' 'That doesn't sound like a fairy tale,' said Ash. 'Wait,' said Elle, 'it was. They developed this thing where they went into a coma after they were told they were being deported. Like there was no medical explanation for it, but it was a full-on coma. It always reminded me of Sleeping Beauty. I'm sure she went to sleep for one hundred years?' 'My dad would call that a physical reaction to a psychological situation,' said Laila. 'He loves stories like that.' Fred wondered what his dad would call it. It was like dealing with something by not feeling it.' (p 100)

Discuss this quote in relation not only to this novel but also to the responses of child refugees to the current world crisis.

SCIENCE

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area: <<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/science/>>

ENVIRONMENT & NATURE

Key Quote: 'Fred,' laughed Ash, 'it's a forest!' Different for everyone, he thought. A tree to Laila was something spiritual, to hold her body against, feel its timeless energy. To Fred, it was something in the way. A big immovable something. Laila halted halfway across the fallen tree. A butterfly, grey, black and indigo blue, had landed on her hand. Laila was always touching things: the trees, the stones, the fronds of a fern. She even held her own arms when she stood still. And you always knew when Laila was near because she put her hand on your shoulder, or your arm. They had laughed last year with the social distancing rules. How had Laila coped? (p 64)

Discussion Point: How important is it to be in touch with nature as Laila and Ash are, and to observe nature closely?

Discussion Point: The setting is the Great Otway National Park in Victoria, and the novel ends at Apollo Bay on the Great Ocean Road. The bus route taken by Ash and Fred at the beginning also offers local landmarks to research. Read more about this area and its unique ecology. Map out the journey the five teenagers might have taken by examining maps of the area.

Discussion Point: “He turned to them. ‘You know that’s a thing? When there’s a decrease in atmospheric pressure, it makes a difference between the outside air and the air in your sinuses. That’s what causes pain, like a headache.’ Chrystal’s humming got louder. ‘I get tinnitus, too. When the weather’s going to change.’ ‘Do you have that now?’ asked Ash.” (p 69) What other scientific concepts did you read about in this novel?

Discussion Point: ‘Ash kind of got that. Even if they had no connection to the place, some city people needed to know that the forest was still here. Not totally destroyed. Like it was part of some fairy tale, still in people’s imagination. ‘It’s so old,’ said Laila quietly. ‘Old growth forest.’ ‘Do you think it will heal? The parts that’ve been logged?’ ‘It might,’ said Laila. ‘Like in a hundred years. Or maybe a thousand.’ (p 176) How damaging is the logging of old growth forests and what can we do as individual citizens to arrest this damage?

[See also **English Language & Literacy – Symbolism** below for information on the forest as a symbol.]

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area: <<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

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

NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

Discussion Point: This is a third-person account of a night in a forest in which dialogue and interior monologues reveal personal perspectives of three of the five main characters – Elle, Fred and Ash. The narrative also includes tiny snippets from Chrystal’s point of view, and the only avenue via which we receive Laila’s point of view is through dialogue. Discuss how the story is revealed from the points of view and thoughts of three of the characters (Elle, Fred and Ash) with Laila and Chrystal revealed more through the other characters’ perceptions of them. How does this work as a technique, in dovetailing the narrative from the three main characters’ points of view? And discuss, as well, that there is also a separate ‘voice’ in the story – that of the narrator.

SYMBOLISM

Discussion Point: Art acts as a symbolic device in the novel; Fred’s acute eye observes colours and hues in an evocative way: ‘Fred had a window seat. Even if he didn’t want to, he noticed things. Slanted sunlight shone in pale shafts through the trees and across the road. Like a path to the sky. Spectrum Orange. Naples Yellow. Sometimes Fred didn’t hear what people said because he was in a kind of daze, looking at something or other. A colour. But sometimes it was helpful to notice things.’ (p 34) His aunt Jess is an illustrator, but despite his obvious talent, Fred appears to be resisting his artistic inclinations. Why?

Discussion Point: The story of Sleeping Beauty is used symbolically in this novel. It is referred to in a quote at the beginning; in the prank that Fred became involved with during his short-lived time at boarding school; and here: ‘The journey was scarily quick but felt like it would never end . . . something had happened to time in this forest, this night, and from somewhere came the story from long ago, of the girl who slept for a hundred years. Wake up, little girl, wake up. Fred felt her pulse on her tiny wrist. Didn’t the princess in that story have something stuck in her throat? That became dislodged. Apple? Or was that another story. Could some of the protein bar be stuck in her throat? What was it about clearing airways, how do you even do that.’ (pp 65–6)

Rescue is one motif represented by Sleeping Beauty in this novel: ‘There. He’d said it. ‘Laila rescued me, too, by the way. I fell in the creek.’ ‘Elle also rescued me,’ said Chrystal, and everyone turned to her, because they weren’t used to Chrystal participating in a regular conversation. ‘And Chrystal rescued me!’ said Elle.’ (p 241) Fred, of course, rescued Tessa.

An endless sleep is another motif of the fairy tale: ‘I wanted to sleep, too.’ Elle thought of the Swedish children, giving up, silent and sleeping. ‘Like, to forget about it?’ ‘For ever.’ ‘What do you mean, for ever?’ (p 172) What else does Sleeping Beauty symbolise in this novel?

Discussion Point: The symbolism of the forest is also significant in this novel, and relates to both Sleeping Beauty and other fairy tales (eg Hansel and Gretel, Snow White, Rumpelstiltskin) where the forest is a symbol of the unknown, and of the unconscious. Jane Godwin points out that: ‘The forest is often a mysterious place in fairy tales and legends. It is a place of testing, an unexplored realm and a catalyst for transformation. They enter the forest with little knowledge of how to manage it (or themselves), but they come out self-aware. Entering the forest is a kind of threshold symbol – the kids are encountering the unknown and the secrets of nature. But the forest can also offer refuge and protection, and it symbolises instinctiveness rather than order.’

Jane says, ‘And this taps into the title. I did intend it as an ironic reference to the phrase “A walk in the park” (as Robyn suggests below), but I also wanted it to be about the characters facing, and ultimately accepting, their own darkness. Heading into the forest is also about heading into their own unconscious, or darkness, and they emerge having faced aspects of themselves that perhaps they were avoiding, or even completely unaware of.’ Discuss the symbolism attached to the forest in this novel.

Discussion Point: The idea of a *lost child* is another symbolic reference. Not only are the five teenagers lost, but Fred finds the little lost girl, Tessa, as well. The image of a child lost in the bush is an iconic image in Australian art. ‘Fred was suddenly reminded of a painting he’d seen as a child. A girl in the bush, like she’d been beckoned into a forest. Lost. He remembered it because the artist had the same name as him – Frederick.’ (p 50) Encourage students to locate this artwork ‘Lost’ (1887) by Frederick McCubbin <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/5975/>> and his later work also entitled ‘Lost’ (1907) <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/5976/>> and to discuss in relation to the landscape envisaged by Fred in the novel. Then explore this idea as a theme in Australian art, and locate other images of lost children.

Encourage students to explore the motif of a lost child in this novel, and in Australian literature. References include: Joan Lindsay’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Vintage 1998, 1967) later made into a film (1975) directed by Peter Weir. Stephanie Owen Reeder’s *Lost! A True Tale from the Bush* (National Library of Australia, 2017); and Peter Pierce’s *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Discussion Point: What other symbolism did you notice in this novel?

LITERARY DEVICES

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

Simile	<p>'Except for her humming, like a toneless electrical noise, her own personal power station,' (p 45).</p> <p>'And now there was an eerie light, a strange brightness, like a retro Instagram filter, all around them.' (p 68)</p>
Metaphors	
Personification	<p>'A gust of wind, wet gum leaves danced. '(p 169)</p>
Other	

Discussion Point: Encourage students to interrogate the use of words in this text. For example, the title ‘a walk in the dark’ reminds one of the saying ‘a walk in the park’ which generally denotes something which is easy to do. So the title might be viewed as an ironic commentary on the action.

The fact that there are five in their group might also remind one of the classic Famous Five series written by Enid Blyton. The cover of the book seems to resonate with this allusion.

Naming is another related topic: Laila and Ash discuss the significance of their names (p 183) and Fred refers to a famous artist with his name (p 50). Invite students to make other critical observations on possible literary allusions in this text.

GENRE

This is a survival story, an adventure, and a rite of passage novel.

Discussion Point: Discuss the tropes of each genre and how this novel incorporates those tropes.

Discussion Point: The novel is dedicated to Ivan Southall (1921–2008) one of Australia’s most celebrated writers for children. His novels often pitted children and teenagers against the challenges of the environment in survival stories, for example: *Ash Road* (1965) (bushfire), *Hills End* (1962) (storm), *To the Wild Sky* (1967) (plane crash). He also pitted them against emotional challenges in *Josh* (1971) and *Let the Balloon Go* (1968). Read some of his works and compare them to this novel.

STRUCTURE

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

a) The novel is told chronologically describing a night in the forest. It opens, though, with a poem by Emily Dickinson and a quote from ‘Sleeping Beauty’. *Discussion Point:* How do these two texts relate to the action described in the novel?

b) Although the journey or walk begins with the group setting off together, the novel juxtaposes a number of different scenes before that, and afterwards, to add to the suspense. We meet Fred and Ash on the school bus, and then Elle and Chrystal at Elle’s home, before meeting Laila when they arrive at Otway Community School. We also meet Tessa on the bus with Fred and Ash, before a scene in which Tessa is lost (pp 17–18). Later, Elle leaves the group to locate Fred’s missing bag and finds it has disappeared (pp 87–8). Once Fred leaves the others on their hike we witness him finding Tessa (pp 112–15), and then the action shifts backwards and forwards from him to the others. Then, when Ash and Laila leave Elle and Chrystal (pp 174–80), thereafter we witness their three scenarios. *Discussion Point:* How does this structuring contribute to suspense?

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

Beginning: ‘How long has it been?’ (Ch 7, p 89)

Ending: ‘She wanted her mum, her nanna. Where was she?’ (Ch 1, p 18)

Discussion Point: Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

d) *Suspense* is always a key to any narrative's structure.

Discussion Point: What elements of the story created suspense for you? For example, the novel establishes that Tessa is missing but doesn't reveal where she is until later in the action. What other suspenseful features were included?

SETTING

Discussion Point: Description in setting can be used to evoke the emotional impact of that setting, for example, read and discuss this passage:

'Otway Community School, or OCS, was a cluster of mud-brick, rounded buildings in a clearing at the end of the dirt road. It looked more like a retreat you'd see on Airbnb than a school. Nearly all the walls were curved, and the windows, too. Curved walls instil calm. Elle's friend Laila always said that. And whenever she said it, Laila put her hands out to touch those walls, as if she was getting energy from the warm bricks themselves; her long, slim, suntanned fingers spread out and still against the rammed earth.' (p 13)

Activity: Invite students to write a similar passage observing their school and the atmosphere created by the spatial arrangements and design of the school.

Discussion Point: Setting can also be evoked via contrast, for example, read and discuss this passage:

'No Australian would describe it like that, thought Elle. For a start, no Australian forest is ever called the wood. That's for gentler forests, in other places, like Holland. Forests of a different scale, where the light is soft and the ground is mossy and feels like thick carpet. Small forests, with pretty trees, delicate leaves. Fields of lilies, poppies, violets. In Australian forests, the gum leaves are tough and don't rot on the ground. The trees shed bark and hard, sharp gumnuts. And you don't see gum trees lining avenues in cities, even Australian cities. Too rough, too asymmetrical, too big, too wild. Still, sometimes when she was running in the forest and allowed herself to stop still for a minute, it reminded Elle of being in a cathedral, like Notre Dame, or that one in Copenhagen. Grundtvig's Church. Which was strange because a cathedral is so ordered, so obviously a built structure. Yet the forest sometimes gave Elle the same feeling of being filled up with something she couldn't explain.' (p 40)

Activity: Write a description of setting using contrast in this way.

CHARACTERS

Major Characters: Fred, Ash, Chrystal Diebert, Elle, and Laila Moss.

Minor Characters: Tessa Lake, the five year old on the bus; the bus driver; Jess, Fred's aunt; Fred's parents and stepmother (quoted briefly); Elle's parents, and younger brother Hughie; head teachers, Johan and Sammi; Nate, his younger brother, Matt, Dale, the owner and driver, and Sean – the four guys in the Hilux.

Discussion Point: How do each of the five main characters change during the course of the novel?

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 each person.

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

WRITING TASKS

Activity: Write a diary entry by Fred about the overnight adventure and what it meant to him.

Activity: Write a poem in any style (eg ballad, haiku, acrostic, sonnet) describing the adventure.

Activity: Write a letter as if written by Laila to her guru father describing her changed feelings about him and their work together subsequent to this adventure.

VISUAL LITERACY

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

Activity: Design a new cover for this novel.

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

FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'The driver might have seen him go and sit with Tessa, might have already made a note of it. How sad is that, Ash thought, and he got that sick feeling when stuff in society really worried him, it was so wrong.' (p 5)
2. 'Could have been the last time he really did try to talk to someone. He'd wanted to say that he felt bad, ashamed, that he'd done something he'd regretted. That he couldn't bear to go back to that school. But his mum had said it was late and they'd talk in the morning, and then he'd looked at the colours and they'd all swum together. In the morning, she'd already left for work. She didn't want Fred, didn't want him to be honest with her, so he protected her from himself, closed up, clicked shut like the lid of a tin of Derwents.' (p 29)
3. 'It was kind of funny, his dad pretending to be this physical he-man chopping wood and stuff, when that so wasn't his dad at all. It's like he'd looked at some clinical notes – Fathers should spend time with their sons doing something physical. Chopping wood is one such activity. Try chopping wood.' (p 36)
4. 'On either side of the track were tall eucalypts, blue gums with their smooth bark, messmates. In the gullies, there were wattles and blackwoods. On the forest floor, ferns, grasses and mosses. Ash knew there were so many different types of ferns. Some of the stems were used as medicine by the local Aboriginal people. 'Remember the start of the pandemic,' said Ash, 'when they shut the forest?' 'That's what the government said,' said Laila, 'but people can't shut a forest. It'll keep growing, it'll come to you.' She smiled with her own secret understanding. 'Dad says it beckons you in.' (p 49)

5. 'Was he having a go at her, now? But Elle did kind of get what Fred meant. She'd noticed at OCS that kids seemed a bit more relaxed, they didn't have to perform, put their best foot forward, get noticed. Girls weren't so competitive with each other. Of course, there were all kinds of kids at international schools, just like any other school. But there was that upfront nature to many of them. Elle had learnt that she had to connect quickly, get her personality across, fast-track friendships because who knew for how long any of them would be there before their parents took them and moved on to some other city, country, region of the world. Part of you really wanted to make friends, and part of you knew that it'd be temporary. Did it make friendships more intense? Maybe.' (p 63)
6. 'Australians are laidback, friendly people. They have a –' Chrystal put her hands up, making the quote marks, – "fair go" attitude.' Something else she'd learnt by rote. 'Yeah, I don't know how true that is,' said Ash. 'It's a pretty big generalisation. Australians can be racist . . .' He paused. 'And mean,' said Fred. 'And sometimes homophobic . . .' added Ash.' (p 74)
7. 'Just because I wanted children of my own doesn't mean that I'm happy to take her reject. I didn't want just any kid, I wanted my own kid.' Fred shook his head, trying to get rid of the memory.' (p 84)
8. 'Elle was beginning to wish she'd let Fred keep the stupid cans. At least then they'd still have the stuff they really needed. If she hadn't tried to assert herself, throw her weight around . . .' (p 110)
9. 'Mmmmmmmmm Wisconsin is part of Tornado Alley.' 'Right.' Okay that came out of nowhere. But good she'd got off that other topic. 'Tornadoes in Madison can tear the roof off a house.' 'We have cyclones here, too,' said Ash. 'Hey, Chrystal,' said Laila gently, 'storms are nature's way of healing. They break up the canopy, let light into the forest. And blow seeds around, so they can grow again.' 'Yeah,' said Ash. 'Nature has its own solutions.' But people are always trying to control nature, he thought as they bushbashed through the rain. Not go with it, like the way they lived in the community. Ash remembered the storms in the Kimberley. They were magnificent. And the clear nights, too. Meteor showers, falling stars. He missed those nights, sleeping outside in a swag by the fire with his friends. And in the morning making damper, the warm, salty, soothing smell of it in the coals.' (p 139)
10. 'No, that is a part of him.' Laila took Ash's arm again. The mud was so slippery! 'The guru thing is more what he wants to be, how he wants to be seen.' Like me, thought Ash. Like Fred. Like everyone maybe.' (p 202)
11. 'Fred's dad told him that kids these days expect everything instantly. They don't know how lucky they are. Like life is so easy for them. What, Fred felt like yelling at him, like destruction of the world, like climate change, like parents who can't fit their son into their lives anymore. Like global pandemics, and losing those years. Like people being cancelled all the time. Like the end of forgiveness. And trust. Like it's not easy. His dad was a psychiatrist and everything, but Fred knew that was no protection at all.' (p 236)
12. 'Ash used to think that there were good people and bad people and once you knew who was who, it was easy to work out and things would be consistent. But looking at Fred, he realised that it's so much more complicated than that. He was about to say 'Sure, that's okay,' when Fred burst out, 'Hey, isn't this morning beautiful?' It was a very un-Fred thing to say. And it was like they didn't need to talk about the night anymore, just then. It would be a while before they talked about it much at all.' (pp 243–4)

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Compare this novel to other rite of passage young adult novels. [See **Bibliography**.]
2. Design a poster to advertise this book.
3. What other **title** might this book have had?
4. **Debate any of the topics** covered in these notes, or suggested by the novel.
5. Locate and study **poetry** which relates to this novel. [See **Bibliography**.]

CONCLUSION

Each of these five teenagers arrives home having changed during their overnight ordeal. Each has come to appreciate the other members of their group with more insight and understanding. Each is likely to return to their home and school with new attitudes to their families, friends, and life choices. A walk in the dark proves to be a walk into the light for these five young people.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Godwin is the highly acclaimed and internationally published author of many books for children and young people, across all styles and ages. Children's Publisher at Penguin Books Australia for many years, Jane was the co-creator with Davina Bell of the Our Australian Girl series of quality historical fiction for middle readers. Jane's books include her novels *Falling From Grace*, *As Happy as Here* (a CBCA Notable Book) and *When Rain Turns to Snow* (shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers and for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards) and picture books *Go Go and the Silver Shoes* (illustrated by Anna Walker), *The Silver Sea* (with Alison Lester and patients at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne) and *Watch This!* (with designer Beci Orpin and photographer Hilary Walker). Jane is dedicated to pursuing quality and enriching reading and writing experiences for young people, and spends as much time as she can working with them in schools and communities and running literature and writing programs.

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Great Otway National Park

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