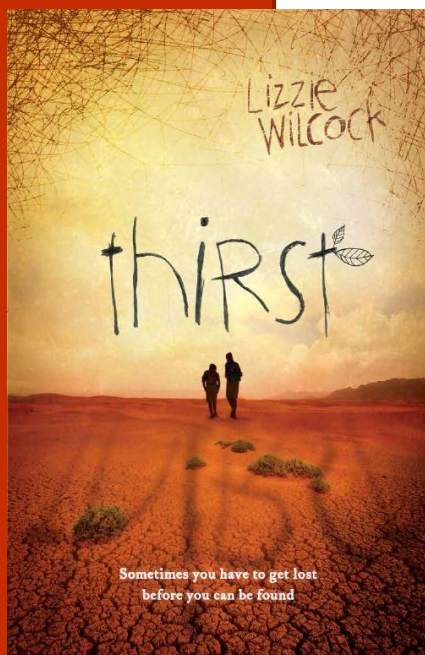


# THIRST

LIZZIE WILCOCK



Karanda Hooke doesn't need anybody or anything. On her way to her sixth foster home, a crash leaves her stranded in the desert with only a backpack, a bottle of water and a stained picture of the mother she hasn't seen in years. But although there's no civilisation for miles and miles, for the first time, she feels like she is where she belongs, like she has a future ahead of her. There's only one thing in her way . . . eight-year-old Solomon. As the two children make their way through the outback, Karanda and Solomon have a few lessons to learn about the ties that bind us—and one link that might come as the biggest surprise of all.

This new novel from acclaimed author Lizzie Wilcock is a powerful and poignant story of two children's search for love and belonging.

**From the Author:** Years ago, I read Gary Paulsen's **Hatchet**, set in the Canadian wilderness, and I was intrigued with every challenge that Brian Robeson, the lead character, had to deal with to survive in his remote, lush, green, lakeside environment. I wanted to write a survival story where the lead character faces an almost opposite set of environmental conditions. The perfect location for this setting was the Australian desert. The one thing that Brian had plenty of was water. In the Australian desert water is rare and precious. I was intrigued as to how a teenager could survive in the Australian desert.

Like Brian, Karanda Hooke also has inner demons she must face, as does her young companion, Solomon. The Australian desert and the Canadian wilderness are quiet places and there is a lot of time for thought and reflection and for coming to terms with one's life.

Whilst the parallels between the two novels are clear, **Thirst** is also a story about friendship, the true meaning of family and the survival of the human spirit in one of the harshest environments on Earth.

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**NOTE:** **Thirst** deals with several challenging issues regarding the children's welfare system, grief and loss. Educators should be mindful of students' personal circumstances when commencing study of this title.

## TEACHER NOTES

- Read Gary Paulsen's **Hatchet**, which was Lizzie Wilcock's inspiration for **Thirst**. As a class, conduct a comparative study of the two books. Some points to consider could include:
  - How are the protagonists of each book similar? How are they different?
  - How do both books open? What emotions do they convey and how is this turned on its head as events unfold?
  - Compare the different landscapes in the two books. What challenges do the protagonists face as they strive for survival?
  - How could modern tracking technology have changed the outcome of **Hatchet**? How has Lizzie Wilcock addressed the development of this technology in **Thirst**?
- Karanda has lived in many foster homes, as well as her mother's home. In pairs, compare and contrast her life and experiences in each of these homes. What were the positives and negatives of each household? Which one (if any) was the best home for her? Present your argument to the class.
- The author reveals Karanda's past in small bursts throughout the story. How does this affect the way you understand Karanda's character? Would you have read the story differently if you knew Karanda's past *before* she runs away? Why/why not? Map out the story and mark where you receive each bit of information about Karanda. How are these little revelations positioned in relation to what is happening out in the desert?
- Like Karanda, the author only gives us small bursts of insight into Solomon's character. How does this affect how you interpret him? How would your interpretation of him have changed had you known about his true identity and his disability from the book's outset?
- Karanda has sabotaged many opportunities in her life. Why do you think she does this? Identify these opportunities and write a brief description of how she might have used them to her advantage.
- How do you interpret the conversation that Karanda overhears between Gina and Brad Saunders? Is it any different to how Karanda interprets it? How do you think the

story might have played out if Karanda had spoken to the Saunders' about her fears? Write a script for a radio play of that conversation. Consider Gina's and Karanda's concerns and how they might have been addressed.

- This is a survival story set in the Australian desert. Write a short survival story about a child lost or trying to survive in another remote location.
- How is foster care different to adoption? How do you think it might affect a child to be fostered rather than adopted and vice versa? For advanced students, you might investigate the state and federal policies on fostering and adoption, and consider the benefits and limitations of both options.
- What do you think drives Solomon? Why do you think he attaches to Karanda, and why does he conceal his true identity?
- Although water is noticeably absent for large tracts of the story, it is a constant feature throughout. What could water symbolise in **Thirst**? How does it manifest throughout the story (eg rain, a plastic bottle, a flash flood)? What might each of these manifestations represent?
- A larger proportion of the story is told from Karanda's perspective than Solomon's. Why do you think this is? Try narrating a portion of Karanda's story from Solomon's point of view. How is your interpretation of her altered through his eyes?
- Karanda and Solomon are forced to seek out animal meat to survive. Discuss as a class why a purely vegetable diet is not sustainable for the two children. How does the author sensitively deal with the concept of hunting and killing your own food in **Thirst**?
- Solomon has learned his survival skills by watching **Bush Tucker Man**. This show, hosted by Les Hiddins, ran from 1988 to 1996. Watch a few episodes of this show (you can find many of them on YouTube, for example [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_czeCgS4J4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_czeCgS4J4)). How would you update this show for a modern audience? In small groups, research bush tucker, write a short episode of a new bush show and film it. Select members of the group to be the director, editor and presenter/s of your show.
- 'Karanda felt rich. She didn't have a single possession to her name, but she had things she'd never had before. Freedom.

Independence. A sense of achievement. And a companion who didn't know her past' (p 81). Discuss this passage. How important is it for a child to have these things? How does it affect, for example, a child's growth and development into adulthood? Look at Karanda's upbringing in the Saunders' household. Do you think Brad and Gina try to give Karanda a sense of achievement and responsibility (eg with Lucky)? Conversely, how does a sense of responsibility burden Solomon? Is he too young to shoulder this burden?

- What does Karanda mean when she shouts, 'I've been thirsty my whole life' (p 240)? How is the concept of thirst layered with meaning in this book? Is it possible to have an upbringing that meets all physical needs but neglects emotional ones? How about vice versa? Discuss your answers as a class. Compare and contrast Solomon and Karanda's upbringings, firstly by their biological families and then by their foster ones. Which, if any, of their needs are being met with each family? Which needs are met out in the desert?
- Are Karanda and Solomon a family by the end of **Thirst**? Explain your answer.
- Conventional wisdom suggests that a book shouldn't be judged by its cover. After reading the book, discuss its design. How are colour, texture and graphics used on the cover to depict the contents of the book? How does the tagline hint at the meaning of the story? How does the internal design complement the text? Design a new cover concept for **Thirst**. What sorts of elements will you combine to complement your book?