

The Goodbye Year

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

It's the start of 2020 and Harper is filled with anticipation about being in the final year of Riverlark Primary. She wants a leadership role, the comfort of her friendship group, and to fly under the radar of Riverlark's mean-boy.

But one by one things go wrong. When Harper's best friends are made school captains they are consumed by their roles, while her own role—library captain—is considered second-rate. Then something major throws life off course—her parents take overseas jobs as nurses in a war zone. Harper moves in with Lolly, a grandmother she barely knows and her five pets, a vast collection of old trinkets and very different expectations.

Just as Harper's getting used to Lolly, the pandemic arrives. She has always been pretty level but is now consumed by worry. Her goodbye year is nothing like she'd hoped it would be. Strange things are happening—she wakes in the night in odd places, fixates on an old army badge that seems to have a mind of its own, and on a visit to the school library during lockdown she's convinced she's seen a ghost.

Who is haunting her?

Can she get through the anxiety of the pandemic without her mum and dad? And will Harper find a way to be happy with her goodbye year?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Gale's books include *The Other Side of Summer* and its companion novel *I Am Out with Lanterns*, the Eliza Boom Diaries, *Steal My Sunshine* and *Girl, Aloud*, as well as her recent middle-grade collaboration with friend and fellow author Nova Weetman, *Elsewhere Girls*.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- How does the title of the book—*The Goodbye Year*—make you feel? What do you think the book might be about? Have you ever had a goodbye year?
- As a class, discuss your experiences of school during the pandemic. Where were you? How did you stay in touch with your friends? What were some of the hardest things about that time?
- Among other things, *The Goodbye Year* is a ghost story. What does this tell you about the book?

WHILE READING

- ‘Since the pandemic, Harper didn’t like to think about the future. It couldn’t be trusted’. (p 48) Do you share these feelings? What are some of the certainties she might have had before the pandemic that she no longer feels she can trust?
- Harper says that Lolly treats her as an equal. How is this different to the way her parents treated her? How does she feel about the extra responsibilities and freedoms she has?
- What is mudlarking? What are some of the objects Lolly finds? How can mudlarking help us to learn about the past?
- How does Harper feel when she covers the truth to her friends about how she feels about her parents leaving? How do you think they would have responded if she’d been honest with them?
- What is the significance of the old metal badge that Harper finds? How does it connect with her sense of a ghost?
- As Will and Harper get to know each other they discover a lot of similarities between their lives. Make a list of the things they have in common.
- How does Misha feel about Harper being library captain? How does Harper feel when she discovers this?
- Why doesn’t Harper feel that her role as library captain is as significant as the other leadership roles? Why don’t Ro, Cleo and Corey think that the library is important?

THEMES**Fear**

- Even though Ro lives on the same street as the school, his parents are afraid of him walking home without a phone. Why is this? How do things that have happened to us in the past shape the way we behave? How does Ro use his experiences in a positive way?
- When Will trips Corey, Harper feels glad to see the fear in Corey’s expression. Why does Corey’s fear make her happy? Do you empathise with her response? Does Corey deserve it?
- Is Harper afraid that something might happen to her parents while they’re in Yemen? How does this make her feel about their decision to stay over there?

Times of crisis

- How do we react in times of crisis? Harper wonders if Lolly ever worries about anything. What do you think? What might Lolly be worried about?
- When Harper reads about the Spanish flu, she discovers that people wanted to keep it secret because they were at war. How do you think the information might have been used against these countries if they’d shared it? How did you see information being used against people during the pandemic? What are some possible solutions to this?
- Harper feels bad when she compares herself to Will, or her parents, who are ‘risking their lives to help people who had real problems’. (p 106) What is a ‘real problem’? Do our own problems become less important in the face of a shared crisis?
- Will describes wanting to go to war as wrapped up with ‘wanting to go, loving them, my country, my friends’. (p 172) How does this change Harper’s perspective of World War I? What else does she learn about war through Will? How are his experiences in the war similar to Harper’s during the pandemic? How are they different?
- When Corey hits someone in defence of Ro, it takes him a while to understand why Ro is upset. In your own words, explain why Ro doesn’t want Corey to use violence.

Saying goodbye

- How does Harper feel about her last year of primary school? How does creating the school timeline in the library with Misha help her to say goodbye to the school?
- Sometimes we need to let go of one thing to make space for something else. One example of this is the news that the school plans to close the old library, but open a brand new one the next year. What other examples can you find of endings becoming beginnings?
- Think about all of the goodbyes Harper has to say in the book—do you think she feels differently about saying goodbye at the end of the story? In what way?
- What happens that allows Will to finally move on? Why do you think he avoids saying goodbye to Harper?

AFTER READING

- What is Harper’s first impression of Lolly? How do her feelings for Lolly change over their time together? What do you think their relationship will look like once Harper moves back with her parents?
- Why doesn’t Cleo tell Harper how she really feels about Corey? How does this secret affect their friendship over the course of the novel?
- Who do you think is behind some of the more aggressive ghostly happenings in the story—Corey’s injury, for example? What makes you think this? What does this ghost want?
- How do each of the main characters in the story respond to the following:
 - Their leadership roles
 - Changing friendships
 - The pandemic.

ACTIVITIES

- Write a goodbye letter from Will to Harper. How does he feel? What does he want to say to her? How does the letter end?
- Make your own family tree, going back at least three generations if possible. Talk to as many members of your family as you can and write one fact about each of their lives next to their name. Write a reflection on something that you learn about a family member.
- Go to your nearest creek or other natural environment and spend some time mudlarking. Record the things you find. Choose one item that takes your interest, and write a short story about where the object might have come from, and how it ended up here.
- Think about all of the moments in the book where things might have gone differently and changed the course of the story completely. For example:
 - What if Misha had been made library captain instead of Harper?
 - What if Harper’s parents had been injured or become sick overseas?
 - What if Will’s ghost had been scary?
 - What if Cleo had been able to see Will as well?
 - Can you think of any other examples?
- Choose one of the above (or an example of your own), and write an alternative ending (or chapter) for the story.
- As a class, come up with a timeline for the school, using photos, newspaper articles, interviews and any other objects you can find. Put it on display for the rest of the school to look at, and ask them to contribute their own experiences. You could turn this into a time capsule for students in the future to discover!