

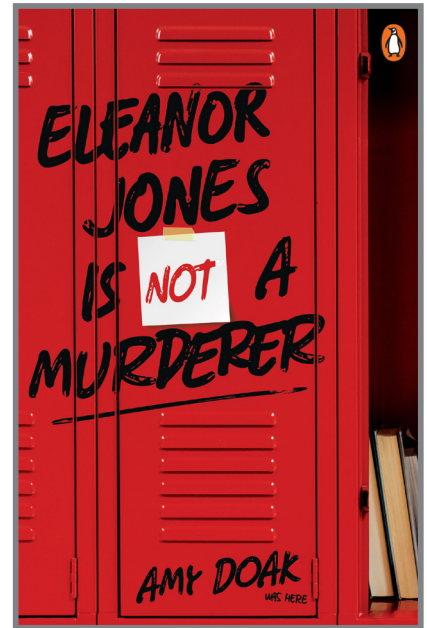
# Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer

AUTHOR  
**AMY DOAK**

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Violence, Sexual References, Drug and Alcohol References)



## SYNOPSIS

Eleanor Jones has just started at her ninth high school in less than five years. Since she and her mum are always moving on, Eleanor likes to stay on the outer, to stay invisible. So maybe it's just bad luck that the very first person she talks to at Coinda Secondary College, Angus Marshall, is stabbed and left for dead the same day. The last message on Angus's phone is from Eleanor Jones.

After being interviewed by the police, Eleanor realises they don't have all the facts and decides to investigate. In trying to understand what happened to Angus, Eleanor inadvertently becomes involved with an eclectic group of fellow students—all of whom have their own reasons to want to solve the mystery.

As they slowly unravel Angus's secrets, Eleanor discovers the true meaning of friendship—and uncovers a danger lurking at the heart of the town . . .

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Doak is a lifelong lover of books, reading and writing. Following a career in media—advertising, radio, television and magazines—she continues to work as a freelance writer and is excited to see her nonfiction writing career evolve into a fiction one.

Amy lives in regional Victoria with her husband, teen, tween, dog and a very grumpy cat.

## THEMES

- Friendship
- Murder mysteries
- Moving to a new place
- Identity
- Challenging assumptions and biases

## STUDY NOTES

### BEFORE READING

- Look at the cover. What can you tell about the book from the images used?
- How has the designer used the typography, placement of illustrations and colours to communicate what the book is

about and what genre or category it might fit into?

- Do you think the cover would be as affective with a different font? Why or why not?
- Look at the back cover of the book and read the quote from Katrina Nannestad. Based on her quote, what do you think the book will be like?

### WHILE READING

- The author has been inspired by a lot of the authors and stories she read growing up. Do you think you've been influenced by the books and stories you read as a child and as you grew older? Is there a particular author you've tried to learn from? What about that author's work attracted you?
- The author mentions that she originally wrote the story in past tense, then changed to present tense for the final version. What difference do you think being in past tense would have made? How would the readers' experience have been different? What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing in past tense and present tense?
  - Choose a section of the story to convert into past tense. Once you've done this, examine how this changes the extract for the reader. Which version do you find more compelling?
- How has the author woven her own love of books into the character of Eleanor Jones? Find evidence of this in the story.
- Pick a character other than Eleanor. Now select one of your favourite scenes from the book and re-write it from your chosen character's point of view.
- Would you call Eleanor Jones a reliable narrator? Why or why not?
- Write a chapter showing Eleanor meeting Angus on the bus. Make sure you stay in Eleanor's point of view and include first impressions, what else is going on around them on the bus and any other details you can imagine. (This could also include details that have been mentioned in the novel.)
- Once you've read the novel, go back and look at the cover elements—how has symbolism been used to plant seeds about the action within the narrative?

### Crime/Mystery Genre

- What typical tropes has the author used to make *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer* fall into the murder mystery genre?
- A key murder mystery trope is the red herring. There are many characters and situations in the story that aren't what they seem to be. For example, Ethan isn't the delinquent bad boy everyone thinks he is. What are some other red herrings in the story? How has the author used them to throw the reader off track?
- Pick a character or moment in the story that is doing more than one thing. Discuss how the author has managed to lead the reader in the wrong direction or to 'trick' them.
- Codes and patterns often play a big part in mystery novels. How has the author utilised this in *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*?
- There are several examples of foreshadowing in the text—some more subtle than others. Can you find instances of foreshadowing in the story?
- Compare *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer* with another crime book you have read. What are the similar themes or tropes or examples of symbolism that you can find? Why do you think these are recurring elements?
- Mystery novels often keep the reader busy, engaging critical thinking in trying to work out the clues and sift the red herrings from the facts. In small groups, choose a pivotal moment from the story and discuss how you would have reacted in that situation.

### Friendship

- Until the attempted murder of Angus, Eleanor keeps to herself a lot of the time. Why do you think she does this? What could have happened in the past to make her think being on her own is the best way to go?
- Are there other examples you can think of—in novels, TV shows or films—where a person on the outer is drawn into a situation despite their desire to be alone? Why do you think this makes a great set-up for a narrative?
- Troy feels guilty for what happened with his friendship with Angus. How responsible is he for what happened to their friendship when he was so young? (p 112–114)
- This story has a strong friendship group as its core. Can you think of other novels featuring a group like this? Why do you think so many novels, TV shows and movies feature a group of young people who bond together to combat a

common problem or adversity?

- Eleanor’s relationship with her mother, Min, isn’t typical. Why do you think the author has chosen this type of dynamic for the story? What does it allow her characters to do, compared to other mother/daughter relationships you see in novels?
- Each of the main characters at some point feels like the odd one out. Choose a character from the story and write a paragraph from their point of view exploring their fears and concerns about being left out of their peer group. How do they help (or hinder) Eleanor’s pursuit of the truth about what happened to Angus.

### Intertextuality and Reading

- Eleanor has a selection of classic novels that she reads and re-reads, but also uses to keep people from approaching her. She also judges people based on their response to the novel she is reading—for instance, at the start of the novel she is reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, but she hates the character of Holden Caulfield and thinks the book is overrated. Write a brief synopsis for each of Eleanor’s classics featured in the book and then choose which of these you’d like to read.
  - Why do you think the author has chosen these particular novels to include? What common themes do they have with *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*?
  - How do these three texts link to the novel *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*? Are they linked by themes? By the plot? Or by the characteristics of the main characters?
- Can you think of other novels that the author, Amy Doak, might have been able to include that would fit in with the mystery theme of the story? Don’t just think classics—there might be more recent titles that could fit as well.
- Why does re-reading the classics give Eleanor a sense of comfort and safety, when she moves house so often? Do you find comfort in re-reading books or re-watching favourite shows or films?
- We know some of the books Eleanor likes to read, and we know that Troy has read the Harry Potter series because the books are in the tree house. From what you know of Namita, Alfie, Ethan, Min or Camille, what kind of books do you think they would like to read?
- The book Eleanor is reading when she meets Angus Marshall is *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Research this book and write a paragraph on how this could perhaps have foreshadowed the events in *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*. Are there other similarities or differences between the two novels?

### Imagery

- *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer* is set in a smaller regional town in Australia, and follows a tradition of crime and mystery novels set in rural Australia, such as the novels of Jane Harper, Margaret Hickey and Chris Hammer, or Fleur Ferris’s YA thrillers. What features of rural Australian towns make them good settings for murder mystery stories?
- What imagery does the author use to evoke a sense of the town’s prosperity (or otherwise), and to evoke mood and atmosphere? For instance, abandoned factory ‘The Sunny’, the descriptions of where the hospital and school are, and Eleanor’s description of the house where she and Min are living.
- Does the story feel particularly Australian, or could it have been set anywhere? What makes it feel Australian?