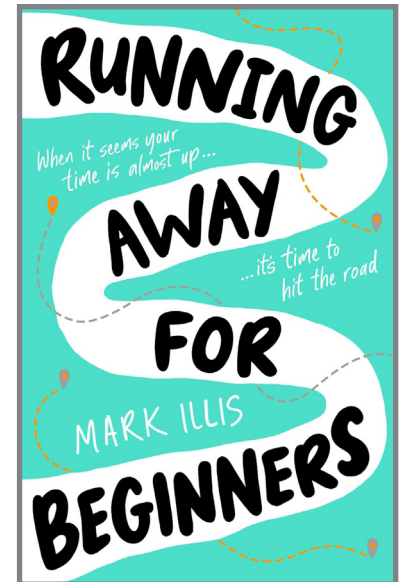


Running Away For Beginners

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SCIS: 5490991

ISBN: 9780702329937

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Secondary

SYNOPSIS

Jasper was just diagnosed with cancer. His treatment starts in a week, and in the meantime his parents want him to carry on as normal. Jasper knows that's impossible.

His friends help to organise a weekend trip to get away from everything that's happened and clear his mind. It'll be like running away for beginners, they joke.

On the journey, they come to understand each other better as everyone's secrets come out. Except Jasper doesn't tell his friends his own secret: that when the return journey begins, he won't be going with them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Illis writes novels for adults and teenagers, and has written extensively for television. *The Impossible* (Quercus 2017), won a Northern Writers' Award and was optioned for TV, along with its sequel, *The Impossible: On The Run* (2018). Mark has had nine novels published in total, beginning with *A Chinese Summer* (Bloomsbury, 1988). One of his adult novels, *The Last Word* (Salt, 2011), was short-listed for the Portico prize. His short stories have been published widely in magazines and anthologies, and he has been shortlisted for the Whitbread Young Writers' Prize, the Bristol Short Story Prize and the Bridport Prize. Mark's TV work includes *EastEnders*, *The Bill*, *Peak Practice*, *Emmerdale* and *Jamie Johnson*. He also wrote the screenplay for a romantic zombie movie, which won the Best Screenplay award at the Bram Stoker International Film Festival.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - Based on the cover and title, what genre do you think this book is likely to be?
 - What can you see happening in the cover illustration? What do you think it represents and why do you think this?
 - What (aside from the title) does the writing on the cover imply about the contents of the story?
 - What do you hypothesise is likely to happen in this story?
 - Who do you predict the protagonist of this story is likely to be, and why do you think this?
 - How does looking at the cover and title make you feel?
 - Would you be likely to choose to read this book if you saw it in the library? Why/why not?
- Having read the first two chapters of this book, discuss what you now know about where and when it is set, and who the main character is. Some things to consider during your discussion might be:

- Who is the main character? Whose viewpoint is the story being told from?
- How old are they?
- Where is this story set, and how can you tell?
- When is this story set? What in the text lets us know the time and date of this setting?
- Is the story being told in the first, second or third person? How can you tell?
- Why do you think the author might have chosen to use the first person for their narrative?
- What surprised you the most in these first chapters? What was surprising about it, and what has it made you think about how the rest of the story might eventuate?
- How do you hypothesise the story is likely to continue and end?
- How has the author shared all this information with us? What literary techniques have they used to convey this information to the reader?
- Where are all the different places mentioned in the story? In pairs, or small groups, look at a map of the UK, and try to identify as many of the different places mentioned in the book as you can. Print out, copy or draw a map of the area where the action takes place, and chart out the journey that Jasper (and his friends) took over the course of the novel. Mark on the map the key points where different events occurred. Some you will be able to mark easily, such as, the different cities mentioned, some you will have to guess at locations, such as, the precise location of the caravan in the woods. Use evidence from the text to support your best guesses as to the locations where the events occurred.
- Do you think that Maika was right to be so angry at Jasper for calling her a ‘nutter’? Why/why not? Jasper never meant to hurt his friend so badly, and even after she had told him what he had said to upset her so much, he still didn’t understand why it was so hurtful. As a class, discuss the fact that an offhand comment made by one person can have a disproportionately negative impact on another, and talk about how we can minimise the risk that something we say will inadvertently upset someone else. What could Maika have said or done at the time, that might have changed the course of her and Jasper’s friendship? Why do you think that she instead remained silent?
- On a scale from ‘carry on as normal’ to ‘teach your kids to shoot flaming crossbow arrows’, where do you personally stand when it comes to reacting or responding to life-threatening events, and why? Write a three-paragraph explanation of your personal opinion on the matter, incorporating a brief discussion of the difference between Jasper’s response to the situation and his parent’s reactions.
- Jasper is not convinced that his favourite meal when he was ten, is still his favourite meal today. What was your favourite meal when you were ten, and is it still your favourite? Write an explanation of what your favourite meal was, what your favourite meal is now, and discuss whether it is the same or if it has changed, and why this is the case for you.
- Suravi thinks she is always right. Is it possible for someone to always be right about everything? Why/why not? Jasper doesn’t seem particularly bothered by this tendency of hers—would you be as accepting of this trait in a friend as he is? Individually, write a brief opinion piece sharing your attitude towards having a friend who thinks that they are always right, being sure to comment on both the positive as well as the negative aspects of this, especially if, like Suravi, they actually are almost always right about things.
- What is the tensest and most stressful plot event in the novel? How does the author increase and maintain plot-tension throughout? As a class, or in small groups, discuss some of the different ways that the author creates and manages plot-tension over the course of the action.
 - Individually, write a brief analysis of the varying levels of plot-tension within the novel, and its effect on the reader, informed by your discussion.
- What themes can you identify as being key throughout the story, and what themes can you identify as being secondary or subordinate? How do the various elements and explorations of different themes interact within the overall narrative? Consider how different plot points are reflective of different thematic principles throughout, and how this drives the action overall. Individually, write a brief analysis of how two of the themes, which you have identified within the novel, are explored through the choices and behaviours of one or more of the characters. Use evidence from the text to support your assertions, and include a discussion of at least one scene where both your chosen themes are exemplified within characters’ actions simultaneously.

- Read the Author's Notes at the end of the story. As a class, discuss the emotional impact of reading the notes, and how it makes you feel about the novel, the characters and most particularly about Jasper and what is happening to him.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE