

Lucas

Ages 12 and up

About the Book

“Brooks’s second novel is an ambitious and intricately crafted tale of love and resurrection that more than lives up to its eye-catching packaging. Growing up on a beautiful but isolated island off the English coast, narrator Caitlin, 15, is deeply ambivalent about the onset of adolescence. When rootless Lucas comes to the island, to camp out and live off the land, he becomes Cait’s friend and stirs her heart. Lucas arouses the suspicions of the insular islanders, who (thanks to the scheming of some unbelievably brutish characters) come to believe that the boy is responsible for a violent sexual assault....[The novel’s] powerful combination of big ideas and forthright narrative make this novel likely to linger in readers’ minds.” - Publishers Weekly, starred review.

“An edge-of-the-seat story...by turns sweet, taut, and terrifying....Teens may pick this up for its sheer intensity, but once they put it down, they’ll ponder its many meanings.” - Booklist, starred review

In *Lucas*, the arrival of a strange outsider is the catalyst for change, which begins with one teenage girl, and then sets off a chain reaction that affects the whole community. Kevin Brooks mixes mystery, romance, tragedy, and a morality tale in this powerful novel, and leaves us with many questions.

Discussion Questions

1. *Story*

Throughout the novel, Caitlin makes choices – good and bad – that move the story along.

· That night after being accosted by Jamie Tait on the beach, Cait questioned herself:

...I knew I ought to tell someone about it, but I couldn't think who... It was my word against his. ...And anyway, I kept thinking what actually happened? He hardly touched you, did he? He didn't do anything...he hardly touched you...

To whom could she have told this? Discuss what their reactions might have been. Could any of them have offered real help? How might the course of the novel have been changed if she had told?

· Cait chooses to go to town in Robbie Dean’s car; she chooses to befriend Lucas; she chooses not to communicate with her father about her relationship with Lucas. How do these choices affect how the story unfolds? Were there alternatives to these actions? What choices would you have made in these

circumstances? Would different decisions have changed the outcome or, as Lucas believes, would things have happened anyway?

2. *Lucas sat down on a rock and rolled a cigarette. ...He was sitting quite close to me. Close enough to talk but not too close. ... Lucas was looking thoughtfully at me. ...*

Lucas: "Robbie's not the one you have to worry about. Angel's the one. ... Is she ill, do you know?"

Cait: "Ill? What do you mean?"

Lucas: "I thought I noticed something when she was at the bridge."

Cait: "What?"

Lucas: "Nothing."

Cait: "Tell me."

Lucas: "That's it – nothing. That's what I saw. She didn't have a face."

Talk about what you thought Lucas meant when he asks Cait about Angel Dean. Did you understand it better at the end of the story?

3. After the violent confrontation in the woods many things change.

· Cait walked away glad that she was safe.

I can't pretend that I didn't enjoy seeing Jamie Tait suffer...but whatever sense of relief I had was completely outweighed by my reaction to the violence itself. Its sheer power, its brutal simplicity, the way it cut straight to the heart of things—it was breathtaking. Up until then I'd always gone along with the idea that violence never solved anything...but now I wasn't so sure. And I wasn't sure I liked it.

How does this represent a change in Caitlin? Do you believe that violence can be a legitimate solution to a problem?

· Lucas takes Dom aside and talks to him. After that, Dom is a changed person. Cait never finds out what he had said.

What do you think Lucas could have said to Dom?

· Instead of telling their father what had happened, Cait and Dom concoct a story to explain their injuries. What are they trying to protect? Do they think that lying to their father and pretending that nothing happened will suddenly make things disappear?

4. *We smiled at each other. It was an awkward moment, with all sorts of unspoken things bubbling away beneath the surface, and we both looked away.*

That was us, I realize now. Us — a moment. That was what we were: a moment. No past, no future, nothing beyond the present. It was almost as if we were different people when we were together, people who only existed in the present.

Talk about the relationship between Cait and Lucas from both of their points of view. Is this a one-sided romance or does Lucas share Cait's feelings? Cite details from the novel.

5. At what point in the story, if any, did you realize that Lucas was going to die? At what point, if any, does Caitlin realize this? Could the novel have ended any other way?

Character

1. Lucas was walking across the Stand. Although he was on the small side, he wasn't as slight as I'd first thought. He wasn't exactly muscular, but he wasn't weedy looking either. It's hard to explain...

The air became still; birds stopped calling. Everything was in slow-motion. It was dreamlike.

Lucas was undeniably beautiful. Then he was gone in a flash.

Lucas is full of contradictions. He can be kind, thoughtful, and gentle one minute, and violent and vicious the next. Who is he? What do we know about him? How do you account for the effect he has on people and animals? What role does he play in Cait's life? What role does he play in the life of the town? Do you see Lucas as a symbol? If so, for what?

2. The island of Hale is a character in the book. What about it makes it more than a setting, more than a backdrop, but a real participant in the story? How do the places in which people live shape the way they think?
3. Bill says to Cait:

"At least I'm making an effort to grow up. You can't learn everything from books, Cait. You can't stick your head in the sand and pretend that everything's how it used to be. We're not little girls anymore. Things change. Sometimes you've got to get out and do things for yourself."

Good friends often give each other advice like this. As readers we believe that Bill and Cait were good friends, but now we see that Bill has no idea what is going on with Cait.

Talk about the character of Bill and what she is looking for in life. How has her friendship with Cait changed? After the events of the summer, can they ever be close friends again? Have you had friends with whom you are no longer close? What changed?

4. In most young adult fiction fathers are shadows, one-dimensional characters. But in John McCann, Kevin Brooks has created a parent who is interesting and who participates in the resolution of the conflict.

Discuss the type of person Cait's father is. What are his strong points and what

are his flaws? How would you characterize his relationship with Cait? What causes him to be so critical of Dominic?

Theme

1. Caitlin's father tells her to write a story about Lucas.

"Anyone can write a story. All you have to do is tell the truth, tell it like it was."

"I don't know all the details, the facts."

Stories aren't facts, Cait, they're not details. Stories are feelings. You've got feelings haven't you?"

If stories are based on feelings, then how accurate are the events portrayed in the novel? Can we trust Cait's feelings to reveal the truth? What do you think the truth really is? Do you discover truth through logic, feelings, or some combination of both?

2. Cait is appalled by Robbie Dean throwing stones at the boy (Lucas).

A surge of anger welled up inside me. I saw their mocking faces, teeth, lips, burning eyes, and the air around them tainted with cruelty, and it hurt so much I wanted to scream. But I knew it was pointless. It would always be the same. There was nothing I could do to change it. So I just turned around and started walking.

Cait stands up for defenseless animals in the RSPCA. Why doesn't she stand up for the boy? Do you agree that there is nothing she can do? Shouldn't you stand up even when you think the cause is lost?

3. Lucas knows the mind of small town people, and he understands their bigotry. Lucas: "People don't like it when they don't know what you are. They don't like things that frighten them. They'd rather have a monster that they know than a mystery they don't..."

Follow the progression of Lucas from stranger to scapegoat. Why are the people of Hale so antagonistic toward him? Discuss times when you witnessed or were the victim of this kind of treatment.

Setting

...Although the rain was holding off, the sky looked ominous. There was a gloomy feeling in the air. ...The weather cast a shroud on everything. The sea looked like thunder.

Throughout literature the fury of nature often sets the mood for the action and serves as a foreshadowing of things to come. On the day of the regatta when Lucas is accused of molesting a girl, a raging storm approaches. Discuss the symbolism of the

storm. Find other instances where the author uses the weather to set the stage for the action.

Voice

The island sky has its own unmistakable light, an iridescent sheen that moves with the moods of the sea...

The mudflats shimmered eerily in the sunlight, giving off a dull gleam that stilled the air.

The hazy air, the mottled colors, the dappled light...it was like a scene from an impressionist painting.

In Lucas Kevin Brooks paints pictures with words. Scan the book and find more sensory images. Read them aloud to your group. Discuss the adjectives he chooses, the rhythm of the sentences, and other writing techniques Brooks uses to set scenes and create moods.

Comparing the Novels

“When I write a book it’s alive in my head. But it only really comes alive when it finds a life in someone else’s head. It’s the reader who makes it special.”

Kevin Brooks invites you to be a part of his novels. First by reading them and then through discussion with your reading group

Discussion Questions

1. The voices Kevin Brooks uses to narrate his novels are distinct and unique. Have someone in your book group pick up one of the novels and read aloud, leaving out proper names and telling details. In a matter of moments, everyone will know who is talking – which novel is being read. Compare the voices of Martyn, Caitlin, and Moo. Talk about why you think Kevin Brooks developed these particular styles for each story. Which of the narrators do you trust the most? Which the least? Imagine hearing one of the stories in another character’s voice. What would change?
2. *I closed my eyes, kept perfectly still, and listened. It was only a very light breeze, and at first it was hard to separate from all the other sounds of the night –the creaks and hums of the house, the occasional sound of a distant car, the faint roll of the sea. But the more I listened, the clearer it became, and after a while I could distinguish the different sounds coming from different trees – a dry rustling from the elm in the back garden, a leafy rush from the poplars along the lane, and from the ancient oak in the field at the back of the house, a tired groan, like the sound of an old man getting up from a chair.*

Kevin Brooks is attuned to sounds, and he describes them so precisely that we hear them acutely: from the sounds of the night as Caitlin lay in bed, to the bustling pre-holiday city streets that Martyn walks, to the noises of the cars

passing under “Moo’s bridge.” Look through the novels and read aloud sections that describe sounds. How do these sections help to build a reality for each novel? How do they help identify feelings of loneliness? How do they help establish character?

3. *Martyn Pig*, *Lucas*, and *Kissing the Rain* all deal with outsiders – both as characters and as themes. And, although the outsider is a common character in young adult fiction, Kevin Brooks’s treatment is new and fresh. In what ways do you think Martyn and Alex, Caitlin and Lucas, and Moo are outsiders? How does this affect their stories? What insights about outsiders did you find as you read the three novels? Do you sometimes feel like an outsider yourself? How do you see yourself in relationship to your world: home, school, and community?
4. There are police officers in all three novels. What roles do they play in the plots? Are they stereotyped, idealized, or genuine? Are they to be trusted? Are they like police officers that you know – either from your experience, from other books, movies, or television? Do they solve mysteries or are they part of the problem? Compare the officers in each book and then compare the officers in all three novels. What motivates them? Are they good or bad?

Does the law differ from the truth? If so, how?

5. Talk about the fathers in *Martyn Pig*, *Lucas*, and *Kissing the Rain* and how they relate to their children.
6. A theme all three novels share is the dilemma of what is right and wrong – the conflict between conventional wisdom versus discovering your own personal truth. What happens when they come into conflict? In Kevin Brooks’s vision, there is not a black-and-white distinction, but rather a spectrum of grays. As children and teens, we are often given much clearer definitions. Talk about what is right to the various characters in his books. With whom do you agree?

Another way of describing this is to say that all three novels are about the search for Truth. What is Truth according to Kevin Brooks? Is it facts, perceptions or feelings? What is Truth for Martyn, for Caitlin, and for Moo? Do any of them find The Truth? What do you do when your sense of truth differs from that of those around you?

7. All of the narrators – the protagonists – seek solitude near water: Moo goes to “his” bridge over the roadway, which he calls “the river.” Caitlin returns to the beach after the first encounter with Jamie Tait. And Martyn spends Saturday at the beach.

The beach? Why not? There’ll be no one there, it’ll be empty. Cold, big, wide open, and deserted ...

Why do they need to be alone? What is it they find in being near water or, in Moo’s case, images of water? Where do you go to find peace and to think things through?

8. If you could ask Kevin Brooks a question, what would it be? Have your group discuss what they would like to talk about with the author.

About the Author

Kevin Brooks counts among his many jobs being a crematorium assistant, a refreshments vendor at the London Zoo, and a civil servant. But he always wanted to be a writer.

It was the publication of *Martyn Pig* that changed everything. After being turned down by a number of publishers, Kevin Brooks sent his manuscript to The Chicken House, who jumped on the chance to publish it. They released *Martyn Pig* in the spring of 2002. In the U.K, the book went on to be short-listed for the Carnegie Medal and win a Branford Boase Award for a first best novel. And in the United States, it was named a Publishers Weekly Flying Start and an ALA Book of the Year, among its many accolades.

One of Brooks' favorite genres is the detective novel, and this shows in his writing, "I think my awareness of plot comes from having read a lot of crime fiction. When *Martyn Pig* came out, the reviewers were saying things such as 'well plotted' novel. I found that surprising because I didn't have any idea that I could plot or structure a story. I do plan, but I'm not consciously aware that I'm building a plot that creates good suspense; it comes naturally because I've soaked myself in those sorts of plots."

Why did he decide to write for children? "There are not many differences, I don't think, between writing for children and writing for adults," Brooks says, "because children aren't that different from adults. But I would say the story is the main thing, with children. With adults you might use different styles and structures, perhaps indulge in fiddly niceties. Writing for children brings you down to basics."

Critics have compared his second novel, *Lucas*, to classics such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Ox-Bow Incident*. Told through the eyes of fifteen-year-old Caitlin, *Lucas* captures the pain and grace of an adolescent girl faced with a moral dilemma – with only her heart to guide her. "An ambitious and intricately crafted tale of love and resurrection," says Publishers Weekly in a starred review. *Lucas* was long listed for the Guardian Fiction Prize, was a Book Sense 76 pick and was also chosen for Barnes & Noble Teen Discovery Program.

His latest title, *Kissing the Rain*, will be published in March 2004. It is a story that Brooks had in his head for a long time. "When the time was right, I just opened the door and let it out," he says. *Kissing the Rain* is the story of Moo Nelson, an overweight teenager who becomes the key eyewitness in a murder trial. "I became Moo Nelson," he says "I became his mind, his body, his words, his truth, and I lived out his journey – from truth to lies and back again; from loneliness to loyalty, from denial to acceptance, from weakness to strength... It was a hard journey at times, but I loved every minute of it."

Kevin Brooks is married and lives in Manningtree, Essex, England.