

TEACHERS' NOTES

LEAVING BARRUMBI

by Leonie Norrington
Omnibus Books

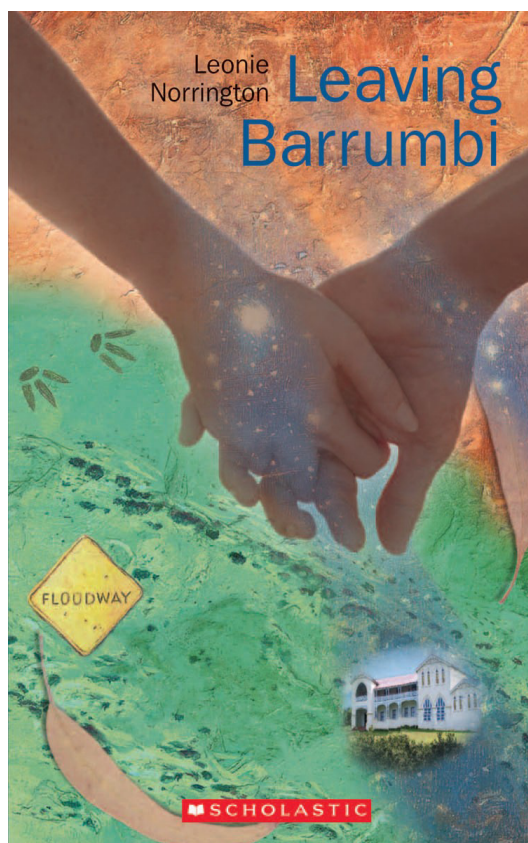
Leaving Barrumbi, the third book in the *Barrumbi Kids* series, is an inspirational tale of two boys' friendship as they continue their journeys into adulthood. The narrative follows the fortunes of Dale, a white child who has grown up in an Aboriginal community, and Tomias, an Aboriginal child who is Dale's 'cousin-brother' because their mothers grew up together in the community. The boys leave the community to attend boarding school. Dale feels caught between two cultures: there are many white faces at the new school, and he struggles to make the school staff understand that he belongs with the Aboriginal kids.

Through a series of escapades, Dale discovers his place in the world, and learns about the real importance of friends and family.

The following notes are designed to assist the classroom teacher in communicating and exploring some of the rich themes and ideas contained in the novel. It is by no means implied that you should work through all of the exercises, notes and discussions found here, but that you select and use those suited to the make-up and level of your class.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- The action of the novel takes place in a boarding school. If you are in a boarding school, ask students to design a pamphlet or poster advertising all the good things about your school. If you are not boarding-school based, ask students to describe what they think life at a boarding school would be like. Revisit these descriptions once the novel is completed, and compare students' ideas with those in the story.
- Ask students to find out how many Aboriginal language groups there are in the Northern Territory and to list at least ten. Encourage them to have a go at pronouncing some of the names.
- Have students choose one place in the Northern Territory from the following list: Oenpelli, Maningrida, Gove, Pirlangimpi, Borroloola. Ask them to discover five facts about each place, and find an image to show others in the class.
- Check with your students to find out if any of them have lived in a community, or have relatives who do.



Ask them if they are prepared to share some stories or information with the whole class or small groups of students.

- There are strong elements of spirituality in *Leaving Barrumbi*. If you have studied either of the first two books in the series, you may have explored Aboriginal Dreamtime and beliefs about spirituality. If not, there are some useful resources on the Internet. Try the following sites:

<www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm> (This is an Australian Museum website. You will require an up-to-date version of Real Player to hear stories, but the site also features accurate and comprehensive written information.)

<www.abc.net.au/southeast/sa/stories/s1530069.htm> (This site focuses on South Australian stories.)

<www.teachers.ash.org.au/jmresources/dreaming/stories.html> (Contains lesson plans for teaching Dreamtime stories based on the 'thinking hats' model.)

Chapter 1 Boarding School

At the beginning of the novel, Dale and Tomias think life at the school is 'going to be all right' (p. 1). They have moved to a boarding school because there is no provision for secondary education in their community. Dale's older brother, Sean, and sister, Megan, are also at the school.

The first day begins well, and we note that Tomias recognises many of the Indigenous kids at the school. When the boys arrive at assembly, it's the first time Dale has seen so many white faces. He realises he must make a choice, and he sits with the kids he knows – with his own community.

Discuss:

- Dale's thoughts as he enters the assembly area.
- What the other kids – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – may think of Dale's actions when he sits with Tomias and the others.

Chapter 2 Assembly

Mrs Winterson is introduced here. The third-person omniscient narrator shows us what she is thinking as she observes the children. It's instantly clear that she does not have knowledge about the school community, and that she expects respect without having earned it.

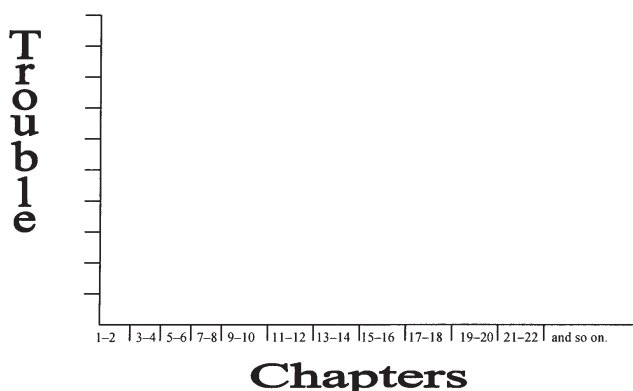
Discuss with a partner:

- Is Mrs Winterson like anyone you know? If so, how?
- Suggest three reasons why her methods of trying to silence the kids don't work.
- Why do you think she closes her eyes when Ms Roe stands up and yells at the kids?

Draw:

- A graph similar to the one below. You may want to make the graph much bigger. Make a single bar, or insert a point (if you would like to make a line graph), showing just how much trouble *you* think Dale is in by the end of assembly. Don't worry about filling in the rest just yet. Explain your choice with evidence from the story.

Use this graph periodically throughout the narrative until it is completed.



Write:

- The note that Ms Winterson might make in her book about Dale's behaviour in assembly. Try to write using words that a teacher might use.
- Your opinion of Mr Harmer. Is he a nice man? Does he like children? Give reasons for your opinion.

Chapter 3 The Office

Dale sees Mr Harmer after assembly to explain his reasons for needing to be in the same house as Tomias. To Dale's thinking, they are family, and so they should be kept together. Mr Harmer asks Dale to see 'Doc Crow': Dale suspects Mr Harmer thinks he is mad, not realising that Doc Crow is 'Dokroe', a friend of his mother's who will understand Dale's feelings about family – this is not discovered until later in the story. Mr Harmer clearly does think that Dale needs to forget his roots and mix with the non-Indigenous students.

Dale is afraid of Ms Winterson, who has nails 'like darts dipped in blood' (p. 22), and it is this, together with his fear that Mr Harmer plans to have him injected 'with drugs that make your mouth dribble' (p. 24) that leads to the dramatic events that follow.

Discuss and collate on whiteboard:

- Why have things gone wrong for Dale? Are they all his fault?
- What could Dale have done differently?
- What could Mr Harmer and Ms Winterson have done differently?

Write:

- About a time when you were misunderstood and got into trouble because of it.

Chapter 4 Endangered Animals & Chapter 5 The Biggest Trouble Ever

The story moves back to the Long Hole community, where Lizzie's perception of order in Miss Wilson's classroom contrasts sharply with the chaos of the previous chapter. Portentously, Miss Wilson's class are studying endangered animals and the effect of land-clearing on native species. This topic foreshadows future events at the boarding school, where the environment and its inhabitants become threatened.

Back at the boarding school, Dale, already disorientated by the events in the school office, becomes further confused by the landscape behind him: he is now both physically and metaphorically dislocated from his culture and his land.

Ms Winterson contacts Doc Crow and tells him that

“One of the students has gone berserk ...”. She seems more worried about the smashed door than about Dale. Her attitude is thrown into stark relief when Doc Crow’s first comment is, “Is he hurt?” (p. 33).

Tomias distances himself from Dale: for the first time; he is ashamed to be associated with him. Tomias establishes a relationship with TJ in the old way, according to family connections. His way of making friends seems straightforward and simple, while Dale feels alone.

Discuss:

- If you were Dale, what would you do now?

Draw:

- Outlines of four people in your class (use butchers’ paper). The outlines will represent Tomias, Dale, Doc Crow and Ms Winterson. In groups, take one character’s outline and write adjectives in the outline, describing the possible feelings of each character at this point in the novel.

Revisit the outlines and add more adjectives as the story progresses.

Chapter 6 Escaping Right Inside

Still in hiding, Dale meets an old woman. They establish their relationship. The woman is a sister to Caroleena, an elder from the Long Hole community. As the police search, she hides Dale by hugging him close to her. There is no rational explanation as to why the police can’t see them: the atmosphere is magical and spiritual. Dale sees the contempt with which the policemen regard the people from the bush: to all of them except one, Colin, the old people are like vermin.

The policemen’s lack of respect for the land is juxtaposed to the old lady’s connection with it. She [apologises to the land] for the trespassers’ arrogance, as she must. It is her responsibility.’ (p. 43)

Write:

- How do we know that the young policeman, Colin, has respect for the land and the people? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Make a list of the adjectives the author uses to describe the actions of policemen. What effect do these have?

Chapter 7 Shots are Fired

Sergeant Small is made to look even sillier here: he shoots wildly at some harmless snakes, emphasising his ignorance of the bush wildlife.

Write:

- A policeman describes the shooting of the snakes as ‘extermination’ (p. 49). Why do you think he uses this

word instead of ‘killing’? What is the difference?

- At the end of the chapter, Dale is surrounded by his family. The students stare at them, look away and stare again. Put yourself in the position of one of the students and talk about what you are seeing and how you are feeling. Give as much detail as possible.

Chapter 8 The Meeting

Ms Winterson’s version of events, as usual, focuses on her instead of the student, Dale. It’s clearer still that she hasn’t a clue how to work with children who don’t fit her ideal. We understand Mr Harmer a little more: he must manage the incident while being seen to support his staff member, whatever his personal feelings. Doc Crow’s voice might be said to be ‘the voice of reason’: he sees both sides but asks Mr Harmer to empathise with the frightened student. Mr Harmer doesn’t realise that he is being ‘managed’ by the doctor.

Tomias remembers the elders’ conversation at Long Hole; he knows he has responsibilities to his family and community. He sees that Dale’s behaviour, understood in Long Hole, is inappropriate at the school. He is viewing Dale objectively for the first time.

The language used by the adults confuses Dale. He doesn’t know what ‘severity’ means. He must be seen to be listening, but he doesn’t understand much at all about what has happened to him so far. He tries to explain himself using the language of the land, but only Sean and Doc Crow understand him. It seems the others don’t want to: they are intent on punishment. Mr Dodger says ‘He must not get away ...’ suggesting that Dale, like an animal, is trapped (p. 59). Indeed, the simile is extended, as Mr Harmer points out, ‘The Doctor here is our animal behaviour specialist ... I suggest ... that we should take his advice’ (p. 59).

Discuss:

- In this chapter, we can ‘hear’ Dale’s thoughts, as well as the adults’ comments. Who do we agree with: Mr Harmer and most of the teachers, or Dale? Why?

Make:

- A poster. Choose five characters from the novel and look for pictures of people who look as you imagine them to look on the Internet, in magazines and newspapers. Annotate each picture with the reasons why you chose it to represent a character.

Chapter 9 Rat Monroe

Dale is now something of a hero among the other students. For this reason, he comes to the attention of Billy Browne, a well known ‘character’ at the school. The boys are fascinated by Dale’s perceived bravery: the girls are concerned about what might happen to him.

Dale’s confusion about his place in this new community is brought into focus when the Indigenous students are offered

an excursion that he is not really entitled to attend. He is startled to meet Rat, an older boy who's looking for someone to do chores for him.

Write:

Answers to the following

- Dale is worried that 'everyone'll think [he's] a whitefella'(p. 63). Is he right? Why is he worried about being seen as a 'whitefella'?
- Should Dale be allowed to attend the excursion for Indigenous students? Why or why not?
- Should schools offer excursions exclusively for Indigenous students? Give reasons for your opinion.
- Describe your reaction to the introduction of Rat. What kind of person is he?

Chapter 10 Caught by the Music & Chapter 11 Billy Browne

Tomias finds a passion for the piano music he hears Kimberley playing. His inability to tear himself away leads to Ms Winterson spotting him. In his panic, he goes along with Kimberley's suggestion about learning to play himself.

Dale continues to struggle to understand what is expected of him, and becomes closer to Billy Browne almost by default.

Discuss:

- Is Ms Winterson interested in Tomias's talent, or does she have other motives for agreeing to him playing a duet with Kimberley?
- Billy Browne is obviously well known for his pranks. Do you know anyone like him? Describe him or her.
- What does Mr Harmer's private study suggest about him? Talk about the objects and pictures in the room.
- Dale struggles to write the essay for Mr Harmer. What is Dale afraid of? (The difference between his thoughts and what he writes down is further explored on p. 82.)
- How does Dale become drawn into Billy Browne's escapades? Why doesn't he say 'Don't! You can't do that!' (p. 84)?

Chapter 12 There's Gunna be a Fight

Tomias discovers that Rat is Kimberley's boyfriend. He responds by playing basketball aggressively, determined to outshine Rat's performance. Rat is jealous and threatens Tomias. Dale is surprised by the depth of feeling Tomias shows over this, and is disappointed when Tomias ignores him in homeroom. Dale sits next to Billy Browne, furthering their connection. Billy follows Dale as he heads to the demountable: they end up hiding together when they spot the Principal, even though they haven't done anything wrong.

Find out:

- How has an Indigenous person, Mr Ah Kin, acquired a Chinese name? What is the link between Chinese and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory?

Chapter 13 A Camp in the Bush & Chapter 14 Setting a Trap

Dale and Billy observe as a council truck appears near to where the Aboriginal people are camping in the bush. They have completely different perspectives on what is taking place. To Dale, they are his countrymen; to Billy they are itinerants and he feels no connection with them. As Dale uses Billy's shanghai to drive off the workers, Billy's admiration grows. The two boys get carried away in their quest to protect the defenceless old people. As Dale still struggles to attend the Indigenous kids' excursion, Tomias is sent a CD from Kimberley which features the music of Bach. Tomias is being encouraged to learn about non-Indigenous culture, whereas Dale is being discouraged from participating in Indigenous cultural activities.

Discuss:

- Ms Roe says, 'growing up in the country doesn't make you Indigenous. It has to be from your parents' (p. 109). What makes you part of a culture? Is it nurture or nature? Are people just like 'cattle and dogs' (p. 113)?
- Dale calls Leopold a 'Mexican' (p. 112). Look up the meaning in the glossary at the back of the novel. Why 'Mexican'? What are the connotations of this term?

Chapter 15 The SRC

Tomias wins a place on the Student Representative Council, much to the disgust of Leopold, who sees himself as being superior to bush kids. Encountering Dale near the demountable, his anger explodes and the boys fight each other. The others join in, the tensions of the last days spilling over. They form a united front when Mr Dodger arrives on the scene. Dodger is so enraged that he decides to contact Dale's parents: not for any old meeting, but for a 'Co-ordinated Disciplinary Meeting'(p. 124).

Discuss:

- Mr Dodger thinks that 'when you have to deal with students every day, the only thing they understand is punishment' (p. 122). Is this true?

Chapter 16 Stuffed Up Again & Chapter 17 The Rainbow

The weekend arrives and Dale finds Sean packing for a trip to the Daly River. Perhaps realising that Dale is lonely, or worrying about what he might get up to at the weekend, Sean re-thinks the expedition and takes Dale to join a Landcare group that is looking after the bush near their school. Dale becomes recognised as a bit of an expert on the types of grasses that grow there: he acts as an adviser to the others.

Dale takes some leftover sandwiches to the old people in the bush. The old lady prefers bush tucker, and throws the sandwiches to the dogs. Sean arrives and Dale is surprised to note that he seems to know the old man. It's clear that Sean has been 'out of bounds' a number of times in his school career: he knows a way to get back to the school without being seen from the office. The boys are shocked to overhear Ms Winterson and Mr Dodger discussing how to get rid of the bush near the school.

Find out:

- What does the old woman mean when she says 'that rainbow bin come back' (p. 138)? What is the rainbow? What is its significance in Indigenous culture?

Chapter 18 Getting Over Detention & Chapter 19 That Barrumbi Mob in Town

Rat sees Kimberley wearing the bracelet given to her by Tomias. He instinctively doesn't like it and tells her to take it off. As she places the bracelet close to her heart, in her pocket, she feels the effects beginning to work ... It appears the old lady is skilled in creating spiritually effective talismans.

Dale begins work with the counsellor Ms de Vahl, and actually enjoys the exercises designed to control his panic. While finishing his essay for Mr Harmer, Dale reflects that perhaps he isn't the only one who suffers from panic, noting Ms Winterson's over-reaction when he smashed the door.

Dale realises that Billy Browne is quite smart: Billy helps him to write what adults want to hear, something that Dale is still confused about. He would like to simply write the truth, but realises this will get him in trouble. As readers, we are clearly shown the irony of this situation.

As Dale and Tomias's families arrive in town, pandemonium ensues. Lizzie is accused of stealing a puppy and Jimmy gets a fishing lure stuck in his arm. The liveliness of the group makes people stare, but this sort of exuberance is a normal part of life in the Long Hole community.

Chapter 20 The Co-ordinated Disciplinary Meeting & Chapter 21 Lizzie in Action

Caroleena, Mavis, Dale's mother and the children arrive in Doc Crow's science block. Seeing the specimen jars, the children are derisory: why would you keep something if you can't eat it or use it for something practical?

Dale is comforted by Caroleena's presence. He feels 'like the world is back in order' (p. 164). His relief demonstrates the strain of his first weeks in an alien environment. The mood is broken when Dale's mum finds out about the meeting she must attend to talk about Dale's behaviour. The other women ignore her wild mood: it would be rude to acknowledge another family's upset.

The meeting takes place. Ms Winterson's attitude in the meeting further highlights her inability to see a perspective different from her own, or to deal with anything other than pristine, quiet children. The language used by Mr Harmer is elevated and does nothing to really communicate with Dale's mother. Ms Winterson seems to be blaming Dale for the fact that the school must now have safety glass in every door, something that would have to be done anyway in a public building. She also holds him responsible for the drain having to be cleared. Dale has become a focus of all her frustrations since coming to the school: she is totally unreasonable. Ms Winterson's behaviour has the effect of clearly showing how Dale has been treated, and his mother is on his side.

After listening to Dale talk about the destruction of the bush, Lizzie runs to tell Meg. The sight of a distressed Lizzie galvanises Meg and her friends into action. Ms Winterson has gone too far. Mr Ah Kin and Doc Crow, accompanied by other teachers, confront Ms Winterson and she must back down.

Tasks:

- Imagine you are going to film Chapter 20 as a scene in a film. Which actors would you cast in the roles? Explain your choices.
- Write a script of the scene, complete with stage directions. Think about how the actors would move, how they would say their lines, and the expressions on their faces.
- Cut out pictures of the types of clothes you think the main characters would wear. Stick these in your journal and label them with reasons for your choices.

Chapter 22 Caught in the Drain

Mrs Winterson and Mr Dodger are the embodiment of ignorance as they see Leichhardt students with Caroleena in the bush near the drain. They instantly access stereotypes, afraid the students may be drinking, or that they will be in some way tainted by contact with 'itinerants' who live there (p. 180). Mr Dodger sees himself as some sort of civilising force, and draws inspiration from a painting showing 'brave men on horseback fighting the wilderness' (p. 180). We have been shown just how wrong this attitude is, and both he and Ms Winterson look ridiculous here.

This contrasts with the gentle education Caroleena is giving the girls in the bush. She is dignified and knowledgeable, and the girls are attentive and interested in what she has to say. Mr Dodger compounds his stupidity by attempting to order Caroleena and Mavis away from the school, not realising they are Tomias's family, and related in some way to nearly all of the Indigenous children at the school.

Write:

- Imagine it is the beginning of this day. Write a horoscope for Mr Dodger, explaining what type of day he's going to have, and what he should be careful of.

Chapter 23 A Weekend in Town

The elders' view of the non-Indigenous teachers at the school

is summed up in the assertion they have ‘no culture and no manners’ (p. 186). As Caroleena sits with her sister, the old man and others in the bush, the rainbow story is told. The land had been violated by the addition of the drain, but now the land is again fecund, and the rainbow can live there once more.

The Long Hole mob are camping out in the bush. Calm has descended, in contrast to the chaos that has marked Dale’s first few weeks at school. Caroleena is amused when she discovers the meaning of ‘itinerant’. She notes that it’s people like Mr Dodger who are itinerant: “‘He’s the one now got no country. Moving everywhere chasing that dollar’” (p. 192).

Find out:

- Lots of cultures have stories that explain the natural world around them. Find a story from another culture that explains the natural world, and present it orally to the class.

Task:

- Use Post-it notes, or similar, to write down the sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes that you might experience if you were by the fire with the elders. Use a thesaurus to find interesting words (make sure you understand them!). Stick them to your classroom window or door.

Chapter 24 You Got to Find Your Own Way

Dale is unable to catch any fish. Caroleena tells him he has to ‘sing out’ to his countrymen, to tell the spirits he is hungry and ask them for food. He is taunted by little Gloria, who says Dale has no countrymen: ‘Only blackfella got countrymen here’(p. 194). Dale feels alienated and angry, and runs away from the other kids. His feelings of insecurity and abandonment are exacerbated when he realises that Tomias didn’t tell him he was voted as a student representative on the SRC.

Dale’s mother speaks to him as an adult, giving him advice about trusting others to know what is right, and having the strength to do it. Dale recognises the truth in her words. Caroleena is offering guidance to Tomias also, reminding him of his responsibilities to his land and people. The emphasis here is on the similarities between the two women, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, doing the same things and belonging to the same culture.

Chapter 25 Getting Away & Chapter 26 The Rainbow Killing

Rat tries to get Tomias into trouble, resenting him for the distance between him and Kimberley. Tomias shows that he really did listen to Caroleena: he reads in the library to avoid trouble.

Dale is devastated when he realises that Leopold has complained about him being allowed on the Indigenous excursion. He feels ostracised from his group and suspects that Tomias knew beforehand.

Left alone, Dale is again befriended by Billy Browne, who is looking for an adventure. Billy’s plans to steal from the kitchen coincide with Dale’s: he has decided to run away. Dale is not thinking about feeding the old people. His head is too full of his own despair. The two of them encounter Rat, who is also stealing. They avoid being seen, while filing away this useful information.

The old people’s camp is empty: the boys overhear Mr Dodger talking with another man about using a bulldozer to clear the bush. Suddenly, Dale decides he must stay and fight Dodger’s plans. They watch as the old man appears and uses his didgeridoo to exact his own kind of revenge on Dodger.

Discuss:

- Dale spends the night at Billy’s house, watching movies and playing computer games. The boys find it ‘hard to remember what’s real and what isn’t’ (p. 213). What did the boys see in the bush: was that ‘real’? What is ‘reality’ and ‘fantasy’? Do films and computer games help to confuse the two?

Chapter 27 The Excursion

Dale is forced to take sides when the excursion returns. Billy isn’t ‘recognised’ like Dale, so he isn’t invited to hang out with the Indigenous mob. Dale looks for Tomias, who is talking to Kimberley. He chooses to go with Billy, even though Billy has described his countrymen as ‘Bloody blackfellas’ (p. 217).

At dinner, Dale is forced to sit with the Indigenous mob, and Leopold tries to agitate him about the missed excursion. Dale learns that Mr Dodger has been missing since the night in the bush, and realises that he knows what has happened to him, though exactly what he saw has been a little embellished. The man that was with him is in custody: Dale must do something.

Chapter 28 Sneaking Out, Chapter 29 Looking For Mr Dodger & Chapter 30 Inside the Ground

Billy and Dale enlist Doc Crow, Sean and Tomias to help find Mr Dodger. Dale realises he might be a little befuddled about what actually happened, so he keeps to the facts.

The landscape seems changed when they arrive at the place where the boys last saw Mr Dodger. Eventually Dale and Billy find the place and Dale panics when he sees the old man. Drawn by Dale’s cry, Tomias leaves the car to look for his brother. He knows that Dale will be in danger if the old man finds him.

Dale finds himself in a cave. The walls are dripping with moisture, adding to the supernatural appearance. He and Billy discover Mr Dodger, who thinks he slipped during the storm. Even in his relief, Mr Dodger hates the fact that it is his two most despised students who have saved him.

Write:

- Tell the story (as you see it) of what really happened to Mr Dodger. Did the old man kill him? Was he struck by lightning – and if so – was it accidental? Did he slip? Write in first person narration from his point of view.

Chapter 31 Back at School & Chapter 32 Fixing Rat

Mrs Winterson continues to try to put things in order. Her new worry is that Tomias might abandon music for sport. She tries to maintain control over the students and over the environment.

Tomias's and Dale's relationship is reforged. Tomias defied his teachings to look for Dale in the bush at night. This is comforting to Dale.

The meeting about what is going to happen to the bushland near the school draws nearer. It is a metaphorical battle about the importance of culture, about adulthood and about links between people.

Dale has grown, and is ready to face Rat, something he would not have dared to do earlier. He cleverly implicates Rat as a bully. During their altercation, Rat's real name is revealed and this will protect students for some time. He doesn't seem as tough when called 'Reginald Augustus' (pp 252–53).

Chapter 33 The Clearing Meeting

Mr Harmer begins the meeting with his usual meaningless rhetoric. His lack of development, despite all that has happened, will contrast sharply with Tomias's speech which comes later.

Though Tomias has prepared his speech carefully, it is Billy Browne's words he trusts in the end: 'If you cut down all the trees to find the devil, you will have nothing to hide behind when the devil comes for you' (p. 258). These words from Billy (or rather, from Billy's father), combined with Tomias's proud stance and delivery, overcome the lunacy that has begun to prevail about a small area of bushland.

Chapter 34 The End

The weather echoes the mood (pathetic fallacy) on the final day of the novel. The humidity has cleared along with the chaos, and there is a sense of renewal in the air. Dale finds himself really talking to Mr Harmer about Aboriginal culture, and, encouraged by Mr Harmer, he begins to think about his own history too. Dale is no longer afraid to tell him what he really thinks. He believes in himself sufficiently to speak his mind. Mr Harmer sounds as if he is finally genuinely interested in what Dale has to say.

The close of the novel brings a shock for Dale. The spear grass by which he has been tracking the events at Long Hole is gone. He doesn't panic this time: his connection to his land and people is just too strong.

Major Assignments

The People

- How does the relationship between Dale and Tomias change during the course of the novel?
- What can we learn about the characters in the novel from their names?
- We never learn the names of the old man and woman. They are symbolic of whole communities of people who do not live according to western ways. What might be the advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside?
- Choose one character and allow the class to 'hotseat' you – ask you questions that they have prepared. You must remember to stay in character while you answer!

The Country

- Discuss the significance of the landscape to the characters in the novel.
- Write a detailed description of a place that is special to you.

Culture

- Discuss the role of family in Aboriginal culture.
- Is Dale part of Indigenous culture? Argue with reference to the events in the novel.
- Will Ms Winterson and Mr Dodger ever really understand Indigenous culture? Use evidence from the novel to support your answer.
- Find out as much information as you can about an Indigenous community near you. Present your findings as a PowerPoint slideshow.

Style

- Leonie Norrington uses a third-person, omniscient narrator. How different would the story be if it was told by Dale in first-person narration? What would be added? What wouldn't work as well?
- Look at the way the bush children speak. Try changing the speech into Standard Australian English. How does this change the effect of what is being said?