

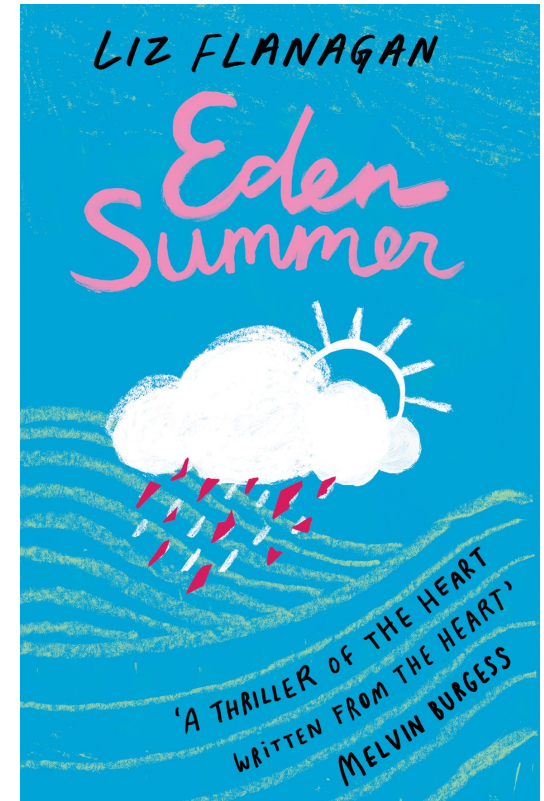
# EDEN SUMMER

LIZ FLANAGAN

It starts like any other day for Jess — get up, draw on eyeliner, cover up tattoos and head to school. But soon it's clear this is no ordinary day, because Jess's best friend, Eden, isn't at school ... she's gone missing. Jess knows she must do everything in her power to find Eden before the unthinkable happens. So she decides to retrace the summer she and Eden have just spent together. But looking back means digging up all their buried secrets, and she starts to question everything she thought Eden's summer had been about.

**Eden Summer** is a tense and thrilling journey through friendship, loss, betrayal and self discovery.

**About the author:** Liz Flanagan writes young adult novels and is currently studying for a PhD in Creative Writing at Leeds Trinity University. She lives in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, with her husband, two daughters, a border terrier and a small flock of chickens. Until recently Liz ran The Ted Hughes Arvon Centre at Lumb Bank, hosting creative writing courses at that beautiful house all year round. **Eden Summer** is her debut novel for young adults.



**FICKLING**  
d b

David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiyah Chowdhury

**NOTE: *Eden Summer*** deals with themes of death, suicide, substance abuse, grief, violence against women, assault survival and loss, and contains strong language and mature themes. Educators are advised to be aware of students' sensitivities when embarking on this unit of study.

## STUDY NOTES

- The title of the novel sets the season for the bulk of the story as summertime. However, the novel's Prologue opens on Christmas morning. Without having read the rest of the story, where do you instinctively place this prologue — before or after the events of story? Why? Divide the class into two groups, one that read the Prologue as a prologue, and one that read it as an epilogue. Discuss how the meaning and emotional impact of the story might change based on where you position this opening text.
- Liz Flanagan is herself a native of West Yorkshire, where ***Eden Summer*** is set. As you go through the book, mark scenes where the landscape is described in vivid, almost photographic detail. Can you picture the landscapes throughout the book? What linguistic techniques are used to achieve this? For students interested in visual arts, try to artistically recreate one of the landscapes of ***Eden Summer*** in the medium of your choice.
- ***Eden Summer*** does not follow a linear narrative, though the core of the story all occurs in a single day. To what effect does the author use the time jumps between the present and the past summer as Jess attempts to find Eden? In what way is Eden slowly going missing throughout the past summer rather than simply on the present day of the story? How do Jess's recollections of key moments build the narrative tension?



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiyah Chowdhury

- When Jess first arrives at school and walks through the grounds, the buzz of speculation is rife all around her. Do you think ill news travels faster than good news? Why do you think this is the case? How do lack of information, misinformation and speculation combine to heighten the anxiety we feel in bad situations? How might this be even more problematic in a small community such as the one Jess and Eden live in, or in a small school filled with teenagers with access to social media and who have their own cliques and social systems?
- Jess is isolated in school and targeted by her attackers because she looks alternative to a norm. What constitutes 'normal' appearance? Who decides what this norm should be? Do you think these standards are particularly helpful?
- Before she actually reveals the truth of what happened to her, what do you think Jess has suffered? The text hints at the trauma she has suffered from the outset with the various psychological and physical scars she now has, but why do you think the revelation occurs at its particular juncture? Do you think it is significant that it is Liam in whom Jess confides her story?
- Sarah Mayfield has a technique she uses to handle situations of stress: 'However bad things are, make a list of three things you can do about it. Doesn't matter how small.' (p14) How would this strategy help alleviate stress? For example, it urges you out of paralysis and into positive action. Use this technique yourself when you are next in a stressful situation, and record your experience. Did you find the technique helpful? Why or why not?
- We only meet two adults at Jess's school: Ms Trent and Mr Barwell. How are these two characters diametrically opposed in their handling of Eden's disappearance and Jess's sensitivities? Which

teacher would you respond to the most and why? Should teachers only be seen as authority figures and administrators (like Trent), or does their role have more in common with a mentor and counsellor (like Barwell)? Compare, for example, Ms Trent to the adults who run the writers' residency later in the book.

- Why does Jess start tattooing her body? Talk briefly as a class about some of the prejudices that we might have when we see tattooed people. Why do these prejudices exist? In what ways can tattoos be seen as an art form? How do Jess's tattoos turn her body into her own canvas? How might this help her overcome her psychological and physical scarring from her assault?
- Although Jess considers Eden as someone who 'had it all', Eden feels spiritually diminished because Jess knows 'what you want and who you are'. (p 36) What sort of pressure are you under as a teenager/young adult to know who and what you are? This is the time of life in which we have to make decisions about what to do after school, college and university choices and careers. Do you think we are equipped with all the necessary skills, information and emotional maturity to make these decisions at this age? Are these decisions as final and irreversible as they seem when we make them?
- Eden describes herself as having only 'minus wishes' (p 37). Are 'minus wishes' really a negative? How can knowing what we *don't* want be as important as knowing what we *do* want?
- Re-read the chapters where Jess is being interviewed by the police. The police have to follow a specific procedure when dealing with any potentially criminal case such as a missing persons report. Jess feels a little resentful of what she sees as their emotionless judgement. Why do you



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury

think the police have such strict procedure and must approach situations in the most analytical way possible? Why would this be especially important in a case such as Eden's which is filled with a high amount of emotion?

- 'Blink once: he's Eden's anxious boyfriend ... Blink twice: he's a twitchy young man with a history of violence. (p 158) Jess refers to the 'blink once/blink twice' motif at several points in **Eden Summer**. What is she drawing attention to about the way we view the people around us? Nothing physically changes about the people she observes, but the narrative does. What does this suggest about bias?
- Read and analyse the two poems by Ted Hughes that feature in the novel, 'Wind' and 'Six Young Men', alongside the English project Jess describes from pp 172-174. Hughes was a Yorkshire native, but why else might the author have used his poetry in **Eden Summer**? What other intertextual references can you find in the novel? How, for example, does the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff from **Wuthering Heights** serve as an analogue of sorts for what happens in the story?
- Read Jess's poem on pp 196-97. In what ways is **Eden Summer** about creating a narrative legacy out of our lives, even if that legacy is only fleeting? How is this tied to its intertextual use of Ted Hughes's poetry? How do our legacies inhabit the landscape even when all trace of us is gone? How might the snow girl created in the Prologue/Epilogue symbolise this?
- As a class, discuss the theory that there are only seven stories in the world. If this is true, what would the stories be? List them on the board and try to fit as many of your favourite texts (film, television,



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiyah Chowdhury

poetry or prose) into one of the stories. Do you find this an effective way to think about stories? Why/why not?

- 'There might be seven stories, but there are a billion ways of telling them.' (p 191) How do stories change based on the storyteller? Why is it important for a tale to be told multiple times from multiple narrators, rather than forming a single, untouchable version of a story?
- 'This is how you speak the unspeakable. This is how you speak even when others have come first and told their stories so strongly. This is how, Jess. In your words. In your way. No one else in the world could've created this.' (p 193) With this in mind, a large part of **Eden Summer** is Jess's 'unspeakable' story — her conscious and subconscious management of the legacy of her assault. How would the narrative have changed had it been the unspeakable story of Eden, who is processing grief and survivor's guilt, or Liam, who is learning to manage his anger but also realising that he has feelings for Jess?

## Themes

- Violence — physical and emotional, committed and survived:
  - ◇ How is emotional abuse a characteristic of Eden's relationship with Iona? Do you think the breach into physical abuse at the summer fair was the tipping point of their relationship, or was it simply the logical conclusion for the cold war that had existed between them?
  - ◇ Read the argument between Jess and Liam on p 179. What point is Liam making about acts of violence? What is he saying about gendered attitudes to violence? Do you agree with him



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury

that 'fair works both ways', or is his argument disrupted by the power difference between him as a male and Jess as a female?

- ◇ Liam attacks Josh after the latter attempts to assault Liam's sister, and then is branded as a person with a history of violence. Is there any context in which violence is acceptable?
- ◇ Jess's experience of the violence done to her is presented in first person. How does this affect the way the reader experiences this violence? How does the author's staccato, fragmented description contribute to this experience?
- ◇ What post-traumatic stress behaviours can you see Jess exhibiting? Why do you think, for example, that she cannot bear to be touched but does not mind touching others?
- ◇ Surviving assault does not end when the attack itself is over — the emotional toll can sometimes surpass the physical toll in severity and duration. What sorts of networks can you think of that would support a survivor and their family?
- ◇ What constitutes a hate crime? What compels people to lash out at things they do not understand? Jess does not present any threat to her attackers — why, then, do they come after her with such ferocity? How might Jess's very unthreatening appearance have fuelled the viciousness of the attack?
- ◇ As a survivor of assault, Jess is not 'in a fit state to articulate [her] needs' (p 27). This presents one of the biggest challenges when supporting survivors of any sort of trauma — trauma necessarily changes a survivor from their natural state of mind, so they can often not identify



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiyah Chowdhury

or ask for the support that they need. In what ways do you think people can try to overcome this challenge?

- Grief and loss:
  - ◇ As a class, discuss the five stages of grief. Can you identify each stage in Eden as the story unfolds? Do you find this a particularly helpful way to think and talk about processing loss and grief?
  - ◇ What is survivor's guilt? How can you see it affecting Eden after Iona's death? What do you think ultimately stops Eden from committing suicide as she had originally planned?
  - ◇ Do you think Jess and Liam's strategy over the summer, to be gentle with Eden and allow her to go to all extremes, was a healthy way to help her process her grief? Explain your answer.
  - ◇ Eden's discovery that Iona is not her blood sister is a significant loss in her life. In what way do you think Eden is grieving her sister long before Iona is killed? How might Iona's premature and sudden death have disrupted Eden's natural processing of the loss of her sister and forced her into a sort of stasis? How does this affect the way you read Eden's behaviour after Iona's death?
  - ◇ 'I wondered what was happening up at their house, the three of them where there had been four. A missing limb.' (p 184) Jess pictures the Holby family as a single entity with a single body. How does a missing limb from that body throw the whole entity out of balance? Discuss this in relation to phantom limb syndrome, where an amputee can sense the



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiyah Chowdhury



presence of a limb which is no longer physically there. In what sense is Iona Eden's phantom limb over the summer?

- ◇ Is it more effective to describe the Holby family as Eden does towards the end of the book, as a chair or stool that has lost one leg? How important is it for the family to process the loss of one of their 'legs' before they can try to rebalance themselves without Iona?
- ◇ 'I've noticed how hard it is for people to say words like: Death. Died. Killed. Dead. I've stood next to Eden and listened to people pussyfooting around it with "passed away". Or "your loss". Or "about your sister" or "Since Iona". If she's got to live with it, surely the least they can do is face the truth of it. It's like they are dirty words.' (p 26) As a class, discuss our cultural attitudes to death and loss. Why do we employ so many euphemistic terms to talk about and to the bereaved? Are words like 'death' treated like 'dirty words' as Jess says? Is using a euphemism for death more of a comfort to the speaker or the bereaved? Explain your answer.
- ◇ 'And if she's dead, let's make her a saint, like they did with her psycho sister?' (p 179) How do we as a community and culture react to someone's death? Why do you think this is? There is a common proverb that one should not speak ill of the dead, but can the opposite — sanctifying the dead — be just as counterintuitive to the process of grief? Should we remember the dead as they were, or as we wish they were?
- ◇ 'Grief is just love with no home ... the love doesn't stop, just because the person has.' (p 271) How can we come to terms with grief by finding a 'home' for the love that it represents?



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury

- Friendship:
  - ◇ Imogen and Charlotte are friends with Eden, but do not share this relationship with Jess. They are Eden's popular friends, while Jess is not part of that clique. As we age, how do we collect different circles of friends, such as those from primary school, from high school, from jobs or sports teams? List three circles of friends that you have and reflect upon how you behave with each of them. Do you share different aspects of your personality with each of them? Why do you think this is? What challenges might be presented, then, if you were in a situation where your different friend circles mixed?
  - ◇ Eden and Jess do not look alike and Eden has friends who 'match her in swagger and style' (p 12), but the bond between the two characters is extremely close. What is the basis of the relationship between Eden and Jess?
  - ◇ How does Eden and Jess's relationship come under strain through their individual acts and their shared history? Was the greatest damage done to their friendship when they stop being honest with each other? Does the pressure of keeping secrets breach the boundaries of their friendship?
  - ◇ How does the task of supporting Eden throughout the summer bring Jess and Liam closer together? Do you think they were ultimately good friends to Eden? Do you think Eden was a good friend to either of them? Explain your answer.
  - ◇ What does Liam mean when he tells Jess that he actually saw her? How do we look at people every day without actually seeing them?



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury

- ◇ '[I]t's not like we exist, perfect pure versions of ourselves, off in a laboratory somewhere.' (p 218) How important is context in how we understand one another? What provides that context? Could you argue that every person is purely contextual, only understood by the relationships that surround us?
- ◇ "'We're all in it together.'" I picture the three of us: me, Eden, Liam, knotted together on an icy rock face, with a blizzard blowing around us ... "She falls and we stop her, pull her up — isn't that the point of the rope?" ... We need to save Eden, cos we love her. But also because saving her is the only thing that can save us. (p 218) Is what Jess describes 'true friendship'? How do the ties that bind us serve as an anchor? Consider that anchors keep a vessel grounded, but they can also weigh a vessel down.
- Fate versus chance:
  - ◇ What is tarot? How does it work? How does it differ from other types of fortune-telling, and how is it similar? Examine a tarot set and discuss some of the interpretations of the various cards. How might we project our own fears and desires onto a tarot reading or any other kind of fortune-telling?
  - ◇ Why does Eden react so strongly to the tarot reading in Leeds? What might have prompted her to go for a reading in the first place?
  - ◇ 'Why is it OK for random bad things to happen, but you can't let random good things happen? ... None of it is fixed. It's not *fate* ... You think there's someone watching us, with a giant pair of scales, weighing what we're owed? Anyway, if there was, I think you've suffered

enough, don't you? We don't get to be happy or unhappy cos we deserve it.' (pp 264-65)  
Do you think we are more predisposed to be fatalistic in the face of bad news rather than good news? How might it be both comforting and crippling to think of some sort of karmic balance in our worlds?



David Fickling Books

Study notes written by  
Radhiah Chowdhury