



The Wild Unknown

EMILY GALE

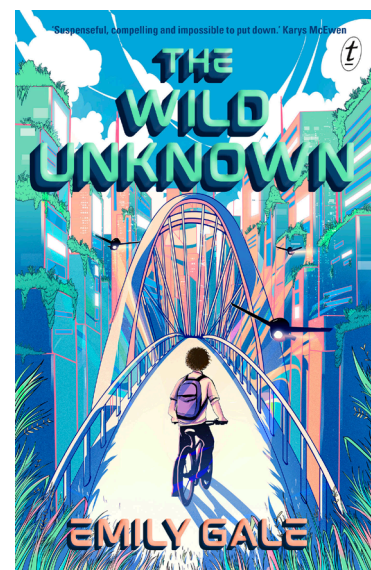
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 10+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Gale's work includes the junior fiction duology Eliza Boom, middle-grade novels *The Other Side of Summer*, *Elsewhere Girls* and *Outlaw Girls* (co-written with Nova Weetman), *The Goodbye Year*, and most recently *The Wild Unknown*, as well as the YA novels *Girl*, *Aloud*, *Steal My Sunshine*, and *I Am Out With Lanterns*. Emily's books have been published all over the world and shortlisted for a number of awards.

SYNOPSIS

It's 2045, and Eddie lives in a world where technology influences almost every aspect of human life. Robots deliver packages, smart scales diagnose illnesses, and tiny earpieces called 'micas' constantly track people's emotions and relay messages. Some tech is helpful, but some—like the drones that surveil the city streets—is more sinister.

Eddie is about to start his final year of primary school. He's growing up, and he feels the need for change. When a boy called Theo goes missing, Eddie and his best friend Kit decide to look for him. They search the river, where Theo was last seen, and discover a confusing collection of clues.

Not long after visiting the river Eddie begins to notice himself changing. He is tired during the day but full of energy at night, he can't stop burping, and his eyes have started to glow. Eddie wonders if he was exposed to toxic chemicals in the river, and he worries that he might be getting sick. But then the changes get weirder.

At Eddie's school swimming carnival he rescues his friend from drowning by holding his breath for ages underwater. At cross country, he runs faster than he ever has before and wins. He starts sprouting feathers, and his burps produce burning gas. When Eddie consults a smart scale it informs him that he has grown taller and that his bones have changed. Eddie starts to fear that he might not be completely human anymore.

Eddie decides it's time to tell his parents about what's happening to him. Just after he does, police arrive at Eddie's house to arrest his mum as a person of interest in Theo's disappearance. Eddie begins to suspect that the changes he's experiencing might be connected to Theo. Will Eddie be able to solve the mystery of what happened to Theo and bring his mum home? And will he finally discover what it is he is turning into?

The Wild Unknown is a thought-provoking sci-fi adventure that explores themes of friendship, change, and our evolving relationship with digital technologies.



BEFORE READING

1. Look at the front cover. What details do you notice? What clues do they give you about the story? What predictions can you make?
2. This book is set in Naarm (Melbourne) in 2045. What do you think the place you live in will look like twenty years in the future? Draw or write a description of your predictions.
3. What technology do you use in your everyday life? How does it make your life easier? How does it make life harder? Are there types of technology you choose not to use, or aren't allowed to use? Why?
4. What is your favourite Australian animal? Do some research on this animal's strengths and special abilities.

WHILE READING

1. What has Eddie carried in his schoolbag since year one? Why is it important to him? Why does he keep it hidden?
2. What news story does Eddie's mum tell her kids about? Why does she think she has to tell them?
3. In Chapter 5, what does the second message from Eddie's dad say? What does Eddie think is odd about this message?
4. What does the Goodbot deliver to Eddie? What does Eddie do with it?
5. What clues do Eddie and Kit find at the river? How do they decide which ones to 'leave or keep'?
6. What symptoms does Eddie describe having at the beginning of Chapter 9? Which sense does he notice is heightened?
7. What do BrightEyes do? What do people use them for?
8. 'Eddie watched his brother force himself to look less angry. Jude hadn't smiled for days.' (p. 73) What do you think is going on with Jude?
9. Who does Jude think he's been playing Ethereal Kingdom with? Why does he think this?
10. What is surprising about what Kit's binoculars detect inside the factory?
11. Why is Eddie reluctant to use the smart scale to find out what's wrong with him?
12. Why is Chapter 19 titled 'Luckier than Theo'?
13. Re-read the description of all Eddie's changes on page 123. What do you think he might be turning into?
14. Why does Eddie feel uneasy when the Goodbot finds him outside Kit's house with another food delivery?
15. 'There is some missing data in my system.' (p. 148) What do you think happened to Jam's data?

16. What changes is Romy going through? In what ways are they the same as Eddie's? In what ways are they different?
17. Why does Asha tell Luke to make tea when she's taken by the police?
18. 'For the first time, what had happened to Theo and what was happening to Eddie had a connection beyond the river.' (p. 170) What is that connection?
19. What happens to Eddie, Romy, and Mason when they get close to the factory? What are some of the purposes of ultrasonic soundwaves?
20. What did 'every machine in the house with a connection' say to Theo and his parents after they reported Theo's changes to the company?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. Re-read the descriptions of Jude and Eddie on pages 3 and 4. How do the descriptions differ? Think about what you know about these two characters after reading the whole book. What are the real differences between them? What do they have in common?
2. 'Not for the first time Eddie thought how useful it was to have an older brother to take the pressure off by doing everything first. Sometimes though, Eddie felt more insignificant than relieved.' (p. 6) What does Eddie mean by this? What makes him feel insignificant compared to Jude?
3. Romy tells Eddie that 'anyone can be a monster'. (p. 38) Which characters in this story turn out to be different from what they seem? Could this sentence have a double meaning in this story?
4. Re-read the descriptions of Mr Lacey and Ms Dunn in Chapter 10. What do these descriptions tell you about the differences between these two characters? What do we find out, towards the end of the story, that these teachers have in common?
5. 'People underestimated Joss because she was small. But put her in water and she was a skimming stone.' (p. 93) The author uses metaphor to describe Joss here. What is the metaphor? What aspect of Joss is being described?
6. Which character in *The Wild Unknown* did you connect with the most? Why? Write a profile for this character?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. *The Wild Unknown* begins with a quote from *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. Why do you think the author chose to include this? Read a copy of *Where the Wild Things Are* or watch a read-aloud online. What connections can you make between the picture book and *The Wild Unknown*?



2. What is the first clue on page one that tells you this story is set in the future?
3. 'His peanut-coloured hair twisted like curly-fries.' (p. 4) The author uses a simile to describe Eddie's hair. Come up with some similes to describe your own hair.
4. 'You are what you eat, remember.' (p. 7) How does what Luke says in Chapter 1 foreshadow what happens later in the story?
5. 'So Eddie lay there in the dark, with his thoughts flying around the wild unknown.' (p. 108) In this instance, 'the wild unknown' is Eddie's worry about what's wrong with him. What other 'wild unknowns' might the title of this book refer to?
6. What does Eddie do at the very end of the book? What does this tell you about how he has changed? At what point in the story do you think this change happened?

THEMES

Technology

1. 'He [Luke] hated the cameras and drones as much as he hated the dangers.' (p. 8) Why do you think Eddie's dad is suspicious of technology? What are 'the dangers' he is referring to here?
2. Luke thinks there should be areas where drones aren't allowed. Asha argues that if drones were permitted near the river they would know what happened to Theo. What do you think? What kinds of surveillance technologies are used today? Are there places that shouldn't be surveilled? Why?
3. Re-read the description of the Goodbot on pages 29–30. What impression do you get of this machine? Is it mostly positive, negative, or neutral? What is it about the description that makes it seem that way?
4. Asha and Luke don't track their kids, though they have the option to. Do you think parents should be allowed to do this? If you were a parent, would you track your children?
5. 'The professors didn't just collect academic data, they also monitored close connections and conflict.' (p. 62) Eddie has a robot teaching assistant—Professor Snawf - to help him at school, although Eddie doesn't find it particularly helpful. Would you like a robot assistant at school? What sort of data would you be happy for a robot to collect about you? What might that data be used for?
6. 'These ribs weren't from animals on a farm but grown from cells in a carefully controlled tank. His dad was strict about meat—he'd cook real chicken but never real beef because of things that happened on the farm when Luke was Eddie's age.' (p. 72) What sorts of things is Eddie referring to here? Would you eat lab-grown meat if it meant less cruelty to animals?
7. 'He felt the old pull of Jam's company. But remembered how betrayed he'd felt by Jam only yesterday.' (p. 222) Eddie is conflicted about his use of and relationship with Jam, his mica. Does he come to terms with this at the end of the book? How? Make a list of the pros and cons of having a mica. Would you choose to have one, if you could? Why / why not?

Animals and the environment

1. 'All day Eddie had been bugged by a wish for change.' (p. 4) Why does Eddie feel this way? Have you ever 'been bugged by a wish for change'?
2. 'But as Eddie ran, something shifted—a feeling that had haunted him lately. His grip on the game was too weak. His imagination had less power.' (p. 50) Why do you think Eddie is finding it harder to get into his game with Kit? Have you ever felt this way?
3. 'Why was he so disgusting?' (p. 104) How is Eddie's body changing into some kind of creature like the way our bodies change as we grow up? Can you relate to any of Eddie's feelings?
4. 'He didn't know himself anymore.' (p. 123) Eddie doesn't understand why he snapped and hurt Mason. What do you think happened? Have you ever behaved in a way that surprised you? Why?
5. 'Eddie had always felt that school was trying to change him into something he wasn't.' (p. 194) In what ways is school trying to change Eddie? In what ways does school try to change you? How do you feel about these changes?
6. 'Part of Eddie had wanted to hang on to what he'd become last year.' (p. 230) At the end of the book, Eddie's changes are reversed. If you were Eddie, what would you have done? Are there any changes that have stayed with Eddie? What are they?

Friendship

1. Eddie and Kit and their other friends often send each other random, silly messages, like 'five seconds of a screaming baby goat'. (p. 22) What silly messages do you send to your friends? How does doing things like this strengthen friendships?
2. 'They had been friends when they were little and enemies for two years; Eddie and Kit didn't know why.' (p. 50) Why do you think Eddie's friendship with Mason changed? Have you ever had a friend that became an enemy? Why?
3. Re-read the descriptions of Eddie's friends on page 60. How are they different? How are they similar? What makes them good friends for Eddie?
4. "'You call it Jam and I call mine Tragus, but they're not human, they're human-like. They're not our friends. They're not even really on our side... The voices and the programming are just made to sound that way.'" (p. 159) Can you think of any human-like technology that we have now? What makes it seem human? Is it possible to be friends with something non-human?



Politics

1. 'Why not just ignore politics and be happy?' (p. 6) Do you agree with Eddie? Why / why not?
2. Eddie's mum works for a company called TruthUp that is 'trying to make news real again'. (p. 6) Why is this job necessary in 2045? How does this connect to the world we live in now?
3. 'It was illegal to camp [at the river] and Eddie believed in that rule—this was a sanctuary for wildlife. Then again, the city was overcrowded.' (p. 36) Do you think people should be allowed to camp in protected areas? What if those people have nowhere else to go?
4. What is Revive? What sorts of ideas do they stand for? Are there any political parties in the present day that are similar to Revive? In what ways?
5. What is Corruption Rebellion? Who have they been investigating? Why? Are there any organisations today that are similar to Corruption Rebellion?

RESPONDING

1. 'Micas went in the ear of a person's dominant side. Eddie was a righty; Jude a lefty.' (p. 3) Do some research on the right and left hemispheres of the brain. What does this tell you about the differences between these two characters?
2. Read the description of Eddie's house on page 5. What makes it different from houses today? Draw a picture of this setting.
3. There are lots of future technologies described in *The Wild Unknown*, such as the self-emptying rubbish bin, the bird-drones, and the smart scale. Make a list of all the tech in the book. Which ones would you be happy to use? Which ones wouldn't you? Why?
4. Re-read the description of the river on page 36. Do some research online to find out more about the different animal and plant species that live there.
5. Kit says he thinks Eddie is brainy, and Eddie replies, 'Not in the way that counts.' (p. 48) What does Eddie mean? In what way is Eddie brainy? In what ways are you brainy?
6. 'Earthy timber stairs, coffee grinds, eucalyptus cleaning products.' (p. 55) Make a list of other smells that Eddie notices in the book. Smell is an often overlooked element of description, but it can be very powerful. Make a list of smells around you, and write a paragraph or short story that focuses on smell as the main descriptive element.
7. 'Creatures could change because of what they ate. Flamingoes turned pink from eating algae. The frill on a frill-necked lizard changed colour depending on the pigments inside their prey.' (p. 139) Do some research on other animals that change because of their diet. In what ways do humans change because of what they eat?
8. Make a list of all Romy and Eddie's symptoms, the animals they could be linked to, and what they might be useful for. Create your own 'evolved human' using animal strengths.