



The End of the World Is Bigger than Love

DAVINA BELL

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 16+

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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 an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

Can you imagine yourself at the end of the world? Identical twin sisters Summer and Winter live on a remote island that separates them from the remains of a damaged earth. The island is a haven: the twins have a seemingly endless supply of tinned food, they have books to read, and they have each other. But the arrival of a stranger to the island, a stranger who might be a bear or who might be a boy, upsets the balance of their relationship to their home and to each other.

As Summer becomes increasingly jealous of Winter's relationship with Edward, the boy/bear, her relationship with her sister suffers. In contrast to Winter's wide-eyed vulnerability, Summer becomes paranoid and sullen, obsessed with protecting the secrets hidden on the island and saving her sister from this perceived danger. On the flip side, Winter's relationship with Edward sees her blossom into someone less afraid and guarded, someone who trusts and falls in love. But is she trusting the wrong person?

As the line between metaphor and reality is blurred, and the girls' earlier trauma is brought to the surface, both of the twins start to crumble beneath the weight of their secrets, shame and fear. In the end, only the ultimate sacrifice will mend their broken bond and set them free.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Davina Bell is an award-winning author of books for young readers of many ages. She writes picture books (including *All the Ways to be Smart* and *Under the Love Umbrella*), junior fiction (*Lemonade Jones*) and middle-grade fiction (the *Corner Park Clubhouse* series). Davina lives in Melbourne, where she works as a publisher.

BEFORE READING

1. *The End of the World Is Bigger than Love* uses magical realism and metaphor to tell parts of the story. Magical realism differs to fantasy in that it applies elements of magic to otherwise realistic stories to make a point. Discuss magical realism in class. ([This link](#) might be useful for your discussions.)
 - What do you understand by the term?
 - Can you think of other stories that you've read that use magical realism?
 - How might the inclusion of magic deepen our understanding of some element of reality?
 - Are fairytales magic realism?
 - Knowing that the story makes use of this technique, what do you expect?
2. The book is set in the near future, in a world significantly altered by a global pandemic. What do you think this future might look like? How do you think people interact with each other? Share your thoughts in groups or as a class.

WHILE READING

1. Consider the opening pages of the book. What details tell you that the book is set in the future? What kind of future is it?
2. There are a lot of signposts that indicate traumatic global events both past and future. Make a list of these as you read. What kind of events do you think they point towards?



- Why do you think Summer and Winter are so isolated on the island? What gives you a sense of whether or not there are other people left in the world? Do you think they remain on the island by choice or because they have to?
- What are the motivations behind the secrets and lies in the story? Is it possible to do a bad thing for a good reason? Find an example to support your answer in the book.
- 'And this probably isn't a Spoiler Alert,' says Summer, 'but, FYI, everything changes, and by everything, I guess I mean everyone' (14). How do the characters change over the course of the book? Is what they want at the beginning different to what they want at the end?
- Are Summer and Winter reliable narrators? Do you believe one more than the other and, if so, why? Keep a list of moments where you doubt one or the other. What do they say? What do they do? Does it make you doubt other parts of their story?
- Summer is often uncertain of the way she uses words. Find an example of this, and keep a list of unfamiliar words and their meanings as you read.
- How does jealousy control and shape Summer's narrative?
- How is the theme of isolation or loneliness enhanced by the setting?
- How does Davina Bell use sensory details to bring the story to life? Find an example where sense is used to enhance the description of a person or place in the story. Find one for each sense (smell, sight, taste, touch, sound). Do these details make the story more or less relatable to you? Why do you think these specific types of detail draw readers deeper into a story?

THEMES

Control

- Summer admits that she can be 'a little, you know, bossy' (29) but insists that everything she does is to make Winter happy. Why is Winter's happiness so important to her? What (if anything) do you think Summer wants for herself?
- Sometimes the need to control things can come from fear. Do you think this is true for Summer? What do you think she's afraid of? Write about a time you've tried to control your circumstances to cope with fear or anxiety.
- 'But Summer wouldn't hear that. There was so much she wouldn't hear, so much that I wasn't allowed to say.' (26) What isn't Winter allowed to say? Why does she let Summer control her? Is Summer stopping Winter from telling her story, or is Winter stopping herself? Why?
- There are moments where Summer enjoys the power she has over Winter. Find an example of one. How do you think Winter feels?

Love

- 'I could say that I'd never loved Winter more than at that moment, too, but that would be another lie because the day I loved her most was the last day I ever saw her.' (18) What does Summer mean by this? What does she ultimately sacrifice and why? Does love require sacrifice?
- After Edward betrays Winter, she asks him if his feelings were real and he leaves a note on her pillow telling her that 'the boat was real' (159). Do you believe that he had feelings for her? Is this the same as love? Is it possible to betray someone you love?
- 'How I loved Summer then, her straightness. It wasn't always easy to love her that true.' (40) Why do you think Summer is hard to love? Is it easy to be loveable? Think about the way she describes Winter. Does she see her ability to love and be loved as a strength or a weakness? Find examples in the book to support your answer. When Summer admits to Mikie that it is harder for her to love someone else than it is for Winter, he tells her that she's doing it now (156). What does he mean? Why is this moment so significant, and how does it signpost Summer's coming sacrifice?
- 'All love has risks,' Mikie the talking whale tells Summer towards the end of the book (179). Is he right? What risks do the characters take by loving and being loved?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

- Edward is seen as a boy and a bear and perhaps in truth he is both. Winter describes him as 'wild, but not wolf-wild or fox-wild' (15), the first day he stumbles out of the forest. Which do you think he is and why? Where do you think he came from? How does Edward's entrance into Winter's life change her? Is this a bad thing? What does he represent to each of the girls?
- How do Summer and Winter describe each other? Are their descriptions accurate? What do their descriptions of each other tell you about their own character?
- Do you think Summer wants to leave the island? Think about the way she describes it at the beginning of the book – 'Even though it was all kinds of crumbly, Bartleby was so beautiful that some days, with the sky peeking in and the ivy vines climbing up the inside walls, my throat would close up.' (12). Why might she want to stay on the island? What makes her ultimately decide to leave?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- Davina Bell uses cliffhangers and unknowns to create suspense. What questions do you have at the end of each chapter? How do these keep you reading? Why is suspense so important to a story?



Future

1. Is *The End of the World Is Bigger than Love* a hopeful story? If you were to imagine two futures, one that you hope for and one that you fear, what would they look like? Do you think the future in the book is one that Davina Bell hopes for or fears? At one point, Summer says: 'But honestly? Hope had been fading for ages by then.' (4) What does she mean? Why do you think hope is fading? Why is hope important?
2. We're given glimpses of Summer and Winter's lives before the island – what do these glimpses tell us about their lives before? What future do you think they imagined for themselves? What is responsible for the future they've got?
3. 'You can see how it's not a completely stupid idea and would have made things more democratic and egalitarian and all that rumble, and because Pops is an A-plus genius, he got it done.' (48) What role did Pops have in creating the future the twins find themselves in? What was his motivation? How did the result differ from what he wanted? What do you think he would have changed if he could? Are we ever really able to predict the consequences of our actions?

Pandemic

4. What is The Greying? How does the writer give you a sense of what it means without going into detail?
5. Think about a pandemic that you've experienced or read about. How does it change the way people interact with each other? How does fear shape our relationships in times like these, and what evidence of that can you see in the book?
6. Why do the characters in the book cut squares in the back of their T-shirts? Why does it take so long for Summer to realise that Winter is infected?

RESPONDING

1. Davina Bell makes excellent use of metaphors to reveal emotional truths about the story and the characters in it. Make a list of images in the novel that stand out to you. What do you like about them? Are they metaphors or similes or something else? What is the difference between a metaphor and a simile? Write your own metaphor for the following:
 - Falling in love
 - Being afraid
 - Something beautiful
2. How important are detailed descriptions to create a sense of place?

Consider the following passage:

'That delicious summer with the bear ended in a confetti-pop of magic and long days out and about, and silky, salty morning swims before the sand blew up all gritty. Lunches in the meadow, plush with flowers – purple ones, mostly, but not just purple

how you're seeing it in your mind right now, I'm talking so many shades of purple that some are shaking hands with blue and some are sidling up to hot pink and the rest are having a good old time with whites and greys and brownie-blacks.' (28) How would you draw this scene? Why is the depth of detail important? What colour reminds you of your childhood? How would you describe it?

3. Metaphors, parables, magic realism, even fairytales, help us to connect with the emotional truth of things that might otherwise be difficult to explore. Why do you think this is? What difficult themes are navigated this way in the book? Is it effective? Write about a something that you find difficult to explore (it doesn't need to be personal, it might just be a topic that you grapple with or have trouble articulating your feelings on). How would you approach this as a metaphor? A fairytale?
4. 'Like I'd told Winter a zillion times, people aren't just their best bits and worst bits.' (152). Write an essay that discusses this quote in relation to either Pops or Edward.
5. The final line of the book is 'And Summer isn't with me. Perhaps she never was.' (271). What do you think this means? Is there a possible reading of the book in which Summer isn't separate to Winter but a part of her? Revisit one of Summer's narrative scenes and reflect on your response with this in mind.
6. Writing about times of crisis can be cathartic, but also very difficult. Sometimes we don't have the language or awareness to craft a piece of writing at the time. But our first job as writers is always to observe and to notice. Use the following prompts to observe the world around you during a crisis. Discuss your thoughts in a group and see where they overlap, and talk about what stories might come out of these notes.
 - What questions do you have?
 - What are you afraid of?
 - How do you think you should be feeling?
 - How are you feeling?
 - What would you rather be doing?
 - What do you wish someone would say to you right now?
 - Where are you in this moment, and what is happening around you?