



The Gaps

LEANNE HALL

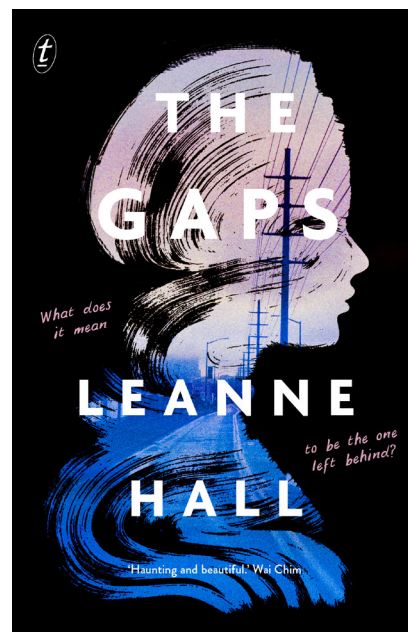
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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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

When sixteen-year-old Yin Mitchell is abducted, the news reverberates through the whole Year Ten class at Balmoral Ladies College. As the hours tick by, the girls know the chance of Yin being found alive is becoming smaller and smaller.

Everyone is affected by Yin's disappearance—even scholarship student Chloe, who usually stays out of Balmoral dramas, is drawn into the maelstrom. And when she begins to form an uneasy alliance with Natalia, the queen of Year Ten, things get even more complicated.

A tribute to friendship in all its guises, *The Gaps* is a moving examination of vulnerability and strength, safety and danger, and the particular uncertainties young women face in the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leanne Hall is an author of young adult and children's fiction. Her debut novel, *This Is Shyness*, won the Text Prize for Children's and Young Adult Writing, and was followed by a sequel, *Queen of the Night*. Her novel for younger readers, *Iris and the Tiger*, won the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature at the 2017 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Leanne works as a children's and YA specialist at an independent bookshop.

BEFORE READING

1. How are women and young girls traditionally depicted in fairy tales? Are these helpful depictions in advancing women's equality or do they instead stifle its progress?
2. Visit the Australian Bureau of Statistics and research the statistics that relate to Australian women. What statistics surprise you in this data? What are the most pressing issues facing Australian women today?
3. In a personal and reflective piece of writing, describe what it is like growing up as a young person in Australia today. You may wish to focus on school, family, friendships and the opportunities afforded to you. Move into groups (if possible, a mixed gender group) and share your responses. Are the experiences in your group similar or different? Why might this be?

WHILE READING

1. What is an identikit? How are they used to solve crimes? Have you seen identikits used in the media?
2. At the beginning of the novel, Chloe describes having a 'chaotic collage' of 'photos and drawings and magazine pages' blu-tacked to her bedroom wall. This collage she explains, is reflective of her inner thoughts. Using old magazines or newspapers,



find a collection of photos and pictures that illustrate the inner workings of your own mind. What do you notice about the images you selected? What does it reveal about your hopes, dreams and ambitions?

- On page 26, Chloe receives a chain email about strategies to use in the event of an abduction. What do you think of this advice? How important is authorship in this circumstance?
- While going for a jog, Chloe gets 'catcalled' by a stranger. What is a catcall? What is the intended affect of a catcall? How does the catcall make Chloe feel? How do you think this might make other girls feel?
- On page 54, Natalia questions the self-defence teacher by asking: 'Why do we have to learn to defend ourselves? Maybe men should have classes about not assaulting and killing us?' Do you agree with Natalia's point of view? What is your opinion on these two methods of preventing violence against women?
- 'Should an assaulted girl look this sexy and glamorous?' (p. 78) A fictional television series is referred to throughout the book titled 'Who Killed Matilda Blake?'. On page 77, Chloe sees an advertisement for the television show. How does she describe the advertisement? Why is this portrayal of a murdered woman problematic?
- On page 141, Chloe analyses one of her Mum's crime novels. How do the depictions of women in crime novels reveal the broader societal issues facing women?
- While reflecting on Yin's disappearance, Natalia reflects more broadly on all the missing girls across time and says: 'All those girls come from in-between places.' (p. 149) What is an in-between place?
- 'Maybe the public will be more sympathetic if she looks young and cute. If she looks older or closer to being a woman, then it's too easy to say: oh, she was talking to guys online. Or dating older men, or going out and being a bad girl.' (p. 44) Do you agree with Chloe's Mum? Are some women scrutinised more harshly than others in the media?

AFTER READING

CHARACTERS

- Archetypes and stereotypes are utilised throughout the novel. How are the identities of the characters in *The Gaps* often stripped away and universalised? What is Hall's intended purpose in doing this?
- How do the portrayals of women in *The Gaps* (both in art and in the media) prove to be inaccurate portrayals of women?
- Why does Natalia decide to cut her hair? What does this act signify?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- Allusions are used throughout the novel, such as allusions to crime fiction and even Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Why does Hall include these allusions? What themes and ideas are being implied?
- How do Natalia and Yin's made up fantasy world of 'Wingdonia' appear in real life? Why does Hall include this fantasy world in the novel?
- Time is a recurrent motif throughout *The Gaps*. Time is crucial in Yin's disappearance, the past is mourned and time stops altogether for the women who go missing. How does time shape the themes and ideas of *The Gaps*?

THEMES

Evil

- Chloe describes the image of Yin's attacker as a 'Generic bad dude'. Do you think evil is more complex than this?
- The media coins the name 'Doctor Calm' to characterise Yin's killer. Is it appropriate to use this kind of language or does this name feel better suited to a fairy tale, crime novel or superhero movie?
- 'I wanted everyone to stop lying to themselves and each other and look at what's really happening, to all of us.' (p. 189) What issues are currently being ignored in Australia?

Art

- How does Chloe use art as a way of understanding the world and herself? What do Chloe and Natalia learn about themselves and each other through the creation of Chloe's art project?
- How are fairy tales shown to indoctrinate young girls into fearing men and men perceiving themselves as the controllers of women?
- Do you believe that Chloe's art show entry was insensitive to the memory of Yin or do you believe it was important to highlight the issue of violence against women?

Discrimination

- On page 79, Chloe reflects on all the women who have gone missing, including an 'economics student from China, a 'trans woman' and a 'Gundtjimara mother'. Chloe reflects that there had been no 'manhunt or media frenzy' about these women and their disappearances. Why haven't these women and their disappearances been reported in the same way as others?
- Women are depicted in polar extremes throughout the novel. For example when perusing Henson's photography books, Chloe sees women as 'ecstatic in one shot, miserable in others' or women who are 'troubled or hedonistic.' (p. 207) What is the



problem of women being depicted in such opposite extremes?

3. 'I hope you understand my photo was for you, I think. You and other girls like you, and all of us for having to live in this shitty world where people don't value our lives. (p. 328) Do you agree with Chloe? Do you think violence against women could be taken more seriously in Australia?

RESPONDING

1. Lead students through an Ekphrasis Writing Workshop. You may elect to take students to a local gallery, virtual tour or alternatively curate art from online sources. Direct students to use this artwork for the basis of a creative response.
2. Hall's novel often alludes to Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, another story about the mysterious disappearance of young school girls. Write a comparative essay in response to these two texts, comparing how they address the oppression of young women..
3. Create your own artwork in response to one of the themes from *The Gaps*. Ensure that your artwork includes an artist statement where you explain the ideas present in your response.
4. The female victims in *The Gaps* are each treated differently by the media. When Yin first goes missing, the news anchor explains a 'possible racial motivation' (p.9) behind the abduction. Research the rhetoric into different missing persons. Why is the language used to report attacks so important?
5. 'It looks like a Bill Henson photograph, one of the barely-lit landscapes I saw at the National Gallery on first term's Art excursion.' (p. 2) Research the work of Henson or another photographer. What do you notice about the mood and tone of your photographer's work? Refer to the visual language to support your ideas. Alternatively, how is tone established through language in Hall's novel?