



THE IMPOSSIBLE KNIFE OF MEMORY

LAURIE

HALSE ANDERSON

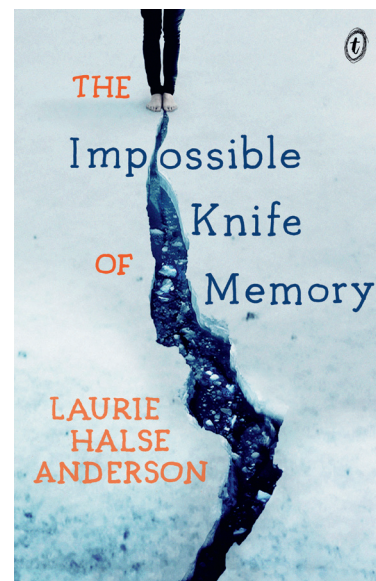
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RECOMMENDED AGE:

YEARS 9–10



Text's Teaching Notes for the Australian Curriculum

- ▶ Text's teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ Students can record their responses in writing through reading journals, online discussions or verbally in classroom discussions.

Strands	LA – Language LT – Literature LY – Literacy
Modes	W – Writing L – Listening R – Reading
General capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy Ethical behaviour Intercultural understanding Personal and social capability Critical and creative thinking Numeracy Information and communication technology
Cross-curriculum priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

SYNOPSIS

Hayley Kincaid has spent most of her life on the move from one relative to another, from one location to the next. When her father, Andy, returns from his final tour of duty in Afghanistan, she joins him as they flee from the dark memories that haunt him. When they finally settle in her late Grandmother's house so that Hayley can finish school, it is soon evident that having a 'home' doesn't stop either of them from running.

This is a novel that highlights the plight of returned soldiers and their families. Andy's fears have fuelled Hayley's own sense of abandonment and feelings of threat. Her constant vigil to protect her father is complicated by her fear of his explosive dark moods. Through her friendship with Gracie she attempts to rebuild her fragmented childhood memories and through her relationship with the persistent and humorous Finn, she learns that she doesn't always have to do things alone. While Hayley struggles to deal with her own issues, it becomes evident that each character has secrets to hide.

The Impossible Knife of Memory is both moving and compelling.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laurie Halse Anderson was born, and still lives, in Northern New York, USA. She began her writing career in picture books, but *The Impossible Knife of Memory* is the latest of her books for teenager readers, including *Wintergirls* and *Speak*. She has been the recipient of number literary awards, including the Margaret A. Edwards Award in recognition of her contribution to Young Adult Fiction.



BEFORE READING

1. What happens to soldiers after they return from war? Do some research on post traumatic shock syndrome. Look at the differences between past conflicts (such as WWI) and modern conflicts (such as Afghanistan). What support is available for returned soldiers? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
2. Having researched conditions for returned soldiers, write a persuasive essay or organise a debate on the topic: Greater support is needed for those who serve their country in war. **W S LT LY** (ACELT1812) (ACELY1813)
3. What do you remember of your childhood? How much of your memory is reliable and how much is influenced by what you have been told? **W LT** (ACELT1815)
4. What does the title of the novel suggest about memory? **R LT** (ACELT1635)

WHILE READING

1. Find the original sources of the two quotes at the start of the novel by Wilfred Owen and Carl Phillips. What is the message in each poem? Keep note of the way that these ideas are reflected in the novel as you read. Find 4 corresponding quotes from the novel to link with each poem. For example: 'their whispers frozen into the stones above them. Remember me. Remember.' (p. 131.) connects with the line in 'Mental Cases', 'These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished' as it suggests that the soldiers are haunted by the memory of the dead. **R LT** (ACELT1774)
2. What do we learn about the narrator in the first chapter of the novel? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
3. What does Hayley's view of Belmont High tell you about her perspective of the world? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
4. 'Everyone is born a freak.' (p.3.) What does Hayley think of herself and why do you think she believes this? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
5. What does the writer do to establish setting in Chapter 3? Is the narrator's description of the setting reliable? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
6. There are numerous inter textual references in the novel. Find two examples. Which texts are they referring to and what do these references tell us in this context? For example, Hayley references Homer's 'The Odyssey'—a story of a journey back from years of battle, in the same way that Andy is on a journey back, although for Andy the return is more abrupt. **R LT** (ACELT1774)
7. Keep a list of metaphors ('The wind is a lion, jaws open wide' p.188), similes ('Dad's voice rumbled like far-away thunder' P.14) and cases of personification

('The gloaming that closed over us the cemetery had crawled inside his skin.'p.154) while reading the novel. Choose 3 examples of each and explain the effect they have in the context they are used. **R LT**

(ACELT1637)

8. In Chapter 5, the writer personifies death. What images does she use to do this and what is the effect for the reader? What analogy is also used here? **R LT** (ACELT1637)
9. What suggestions are there in the novel that the narrator is aware of her audience? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
10. 'Motif: a recurring object or idea [or structure] in a story.' What motifs can you find in *The Impossible Knife of Memory* and what do they represent? For example, drowning is a recurring motif in the novel and used at different stages to suggest the emotional state of the characters. **R LA** (ACELA1560)
11. 'The flaunts, the taunts, the poses; they were all part of the lie.' (p. 18.) What lie is Hayley referring to? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
12. Explore the use of colour references in the novel. For example, Finn refers to Hayley as 'Miss Blue' and Hayley describes 'the gray' closing in. (pp. 33, 298.) **R LY** (ACELY1744)
13. Why do you think Hayley searches online for Trish despite destroying her letter? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
14. Hayley treats life as a combat zone. Find examples of where and when she does this and consider why. **R LY** (ACELY1744)
15. Hayley describes her father's condition as a disease. In what way does it infect other people? **R LY** (ACELY1744)

AFTER READING

Character

1. In Chapter 1, Hayley refers to people as fitting into two categories: Zombies and Freaks. Create a table and sort the characters into the categories she believes they fit in. Is she correct? Where would you place characters, including Hayley? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
2. Compare Hayley and her father. To what extent are they often reflections of each other? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
3. There are two perspectives of Trish in the novel. What are they and which do you believe is most accurate? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
4. Finn's personality adds humour to the novel, but is this simply to lighten the mood or does it serve



another purpose for his character? **R LY LT** (ACELY1744) (ACELT1630)

5. 'She still looked like Kindergarten Gracie around the eyes, but around the mouth...she looked like someone I didn't know at all.' (p. 119.) There are dual aspects to the character Gracie in the novel. Explore the different sides of Gracie and consider what it is that triggers each side. **R LY** (ACELY1744)
6. Explore the moments that Hayley feels removed from herself. What does this tell us about her state of mind? **R LY** (ACELY1744)

Style and Structure

1. How does the author use parenthesis to add to our understanding of the characters and events this novel? **R LA** (ACELA1544)
2. How is internal voice used in the novel? Find examples and explain their effect. **R LT** (ACELT1643)
3. How does the change in narrator and type (for example in Chapters 5) add to our understanding of the events in the novel? **R LA** (ACELA1556)
4. What is the effect of mixing forms of writing in the novel? For example the use of texting. **R LA** (ACELA1562)

Themes

Memories

1. What impact do memories have on Hayley and her father? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
2. Memories are not always reliable; they are often influenced by our emotional state and altered by time. To what extent is this evident in the novel? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
3. Halse-Anderson inserts fragments of memories in Hayley's narrative. What purpose do these serve? Consider the moments this occurs. Is there a significant trigger? **R LA** (ACELA1553)
4. Hayley's memories are both threatening and comforting. Find examples of both and consider why this is the case. **R LY** (ACELY1744)

Fear

1. What frightens the characters in the novel? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
2. How is fear manifested in the behaviour of key characters? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
3. Not all fears are real. Consider the fears that are evident in the novel and divide them into those that are real and those that are imagined. Be prepared to argue your point of view. **R LY** (ACELY1813)
4. What does Hayley fear about the future? How does this impact on the present? **R LY** (ACELY1744)

Family

1. Hayley is torn between her own life and that of her father. How does this conflict affect her life? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
2. As Hayley struggles with her own issues, she fails to see the problems that her friends struggle with in their own families. Consider the family units represented in the novel. In what way are they normal and in what way are they dysfunctional? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
3. 'Family' does not always refer to people who are related by blood. What other versions of family exist in the novel and in what ways are they important? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
4. It is possible to love and hate your family at the same time. Is this evident in the novel? (ACELY1744)

RESPONDING

1. 'It's always there – fear – and if you don't stay on top of it, you'll drown.' (p.6.) Explore the moments in the novel when the characters are drowning. What drives them to this point and what brings them back to the surface? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
2. 'People who have to announce that they are trustworthy deserve to be lied to.' (p.22.) Who does Hayley lie to and who is she truthful with? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
3. *The Impossible Knife of Memory* highlights the human side of war. Discuss. **R LT** (ACELT1635)
4. Imagine you are Hayley or Finn. After Veteran's Day, you decide to write an article for the school newspaper. Create that article. Using appropriate software to create the layout and add visual images to support your story. **W LT** (ACELT1644)
5. 'Their whispers frozen into the stones above them: I am here. I was here. Remember me. Remember.' (p. 131.) In order to move on, it is important to confront memories. To what extent it is true in *The Impossible Knife of Memory*? **R LT** (ACELY1744)
6. 'Gloaming. That short, murky time between half-light and dark.'(p. 133.) Is this an accurate description of the lives of the characters in the novel? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
7. The application for Swevenbury College offers three potential essay topics (p. 194.) Imagine Hayley has decided to apply and write her response to one of those topics. **W LT** (ACELT1644)
8. Modern war has a very different impact from that of the past. Do you agree? Draw on both the novel and other texts to support your argument. **R LT** (ACELT1635)
9. '...the world spun properly on its axis and gravity worked.' (p. 335.) What is it that sends Hayley off her axis and what keeps her grounded? **R LY** (ACELY1744)



1. Hayley is both fearful and curious about her past.
Discuss. **R LY** (ACELY1744)
2. Has Hayley changed completely by the end of the novel? Discuss. **R LY** (ACELY1744)
3. It is not only the teenagers who struggle to survive and make sense of the world in the novel. Discuss. **R LT** (ACELT1812)