

This Is Shyness

Leanne Hall

ISBN 9781921656521

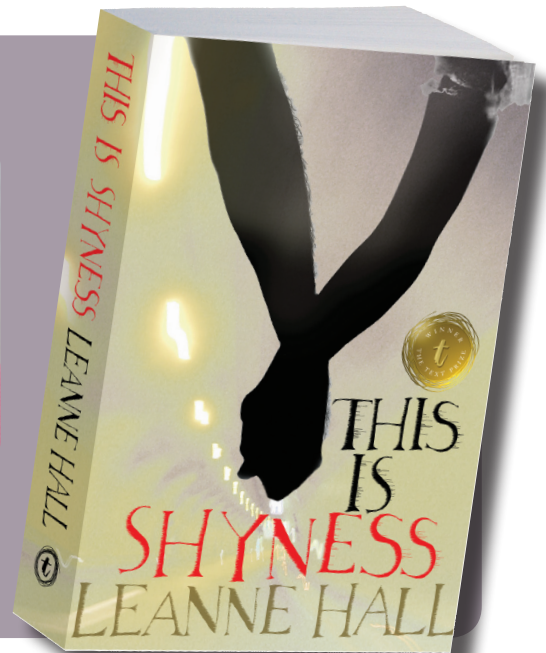
RRP AU\$19.95, NZ\$25.00

Fiction, B paperback

Recommended for Upper Secondary

Resource Kit Contains

- Synopsis
- Author information
- Reading exercises
- Activities
- Extension research



Praise

'I loved *This Is Shyness*. It's a world-tilting romance full of comic-strip cool.' Simone Howell

Synopsis

Imagine a world that is like this one, with pubs and clubs and homes, where people walk in the streets and friends meet, but it is a world in which the sun does not shine and indeed has not done so for almost three years. This is the world of Shyness.

Leanne Hall has created a place which is recognisable yet foreign; a place where people are familiar but strange; where people seem to live in a world which reflects their anguish and suffering.

Wildgirl is an only child, offspring of a mother who is busy with various men and whose father never stayed around to meet his child. Having suffered at school from internet bullying, Wildgirl intends to spend a wild night drinking with friends from work and drowning her loneliness. Accidentally, she trips over Wolfboy and, instantly attracted to one another, they determine to spend a night in each other's company—a one-night stand during which time Wolfboy promises to show Wildgirl around the unusual suburb of Shyness.

A night of dancing and drinking is spoiled by a street gang attack in which 'Tarsier', creatures of this strange suburb, target the couple and leave them as victims to the 'Kidds', a group of sugar-crazed youngsters. When the attack is over, a theft is discovered and it is Wildgirl who encourages Wolfboy to attack the village of the Kidds and retrieve the stolen item, sentimentally linked to Wolfboy's dead brother.

The night is filled with adventure, corruption, personal revelations and the discovery of hidden strengths. Ultimately, both Wolfboy and Wildgirl experience personal journeys which allow them to better understand one another, themselves and their own past.

This book is somewhat fantastical and yet it is grounded in a reality which is recognisable. Perhaps the suburb of Shyness, a metaphor for the actualisation of sadness and grief, is a warning against allowing oneself to be overtaken by the lurking darkness which can engulf us all.

About the Author

Leanne Hall was born in Melbourne and has lived there most of her life. She began her writing career with short stories, some of which have been published in *Sleepers Almanac*, *Meanjin* and *Best Australian Stories*. She has resolutely resisted a sensible career trajectory, and has worked in the arts and educational publishing, in between long rambling jaunts overseas.

Leanne currently works part-time as a children's specialist in an independent bookstore, a job that fuels her passion for books and allows her time to write. She won The Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing in 2009 with her debut novel *This Is Shyness*.

Website: <http://thelongblinks.com/>

READING QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

Chapters 1–6

Read chapters 1–6 and consider the following:

But Shyness isn't a normal place... (p.20)

1. You are writing an entry for a Lonely Planet travel guide. Describe Shyness and the neighbouring suburb of Panwood. Include a section on its history, its climate, weather patterns and population.

In the back of the travel guide there is a section called 'Pubs and Clubs.' Examine the descriptions of the pub in the Diabetic Hotel and the sort of people who frequent it. Write your entry which captures the mood of the place and the nature of its clientele. Do the same for The Raven's Wing.

2. Wolfboy and Neil are presented to us for the first time in chapter 1. Look carefully at the descriptions of both boys. What is it that makes Neil so repulsive to Wildgirl?
3. What is it about Wildgirl that is so alluring to Wolfboy? Provide evidence from the text to justify your claim.
4. Why is Wolfboy so named? Refer to all the hints provided in these chapters. You may need to do a little research on wolves. As you read on in the book, add to your information regarding the 'wolf-like' characteristics which Wolfboy displays.
5. What textual evidence is there to substantiate Wolfboy's claim that the sun never shines in Shyness? What might Hall be suggesting about the sort of people who choose to live in a place of Darkness?
6. Examine the name of this town, Shyness. What might the origin be?
7. At this stage of your reading, do you suspect this book to be a tale of fantasy or reality? Can it be both? Provide evidence for your view.
8. Wildgirl refers to a *cold front* (p.30) that passes over Wolfboy. What might this suggest about Wolfboy's past?
9. When Wolfgirl first meets Ortolan and they begin to talk, it is clear that Ortolan is holding back tears. Ortolan shows off the photo of Diana and Wolfboy responds by kicking the table and running off. As you read on, fill in the background story that explains both their reactions.
10. Why might Wolfboy *need darkness*? (p.39) In what way does the darkness serve as a *heavy blanket*? (p.28)

Chapters 7–12

Read the chapters and then consider the following:

1. In chapter 7, Wildgirl and Wolfboy visit Sebastian, who owns an underground market. Research the concept of the 'black market'. Wildboy says that *mushrooms...do well in the dark* (p.58). Explain this idea with reference to Sebastian.
2. Since Wolfgirl clearly does not play an instrument, why do you think she has purchased a ukulele? What does the purchase symbolise?
3. Orphanville is described as a place *where the darkness is thick* and where one needs to *push against the darkness*. (p.59) Explain what these phrases mean and what they imply.
4. In your Lonely Planet guide, write an entry for Orphanville using the material presented in these chapters.
5. Read the descriptions on pages 60 and 61 of a Dreamer house and the Dreamer lifestyle. Why might individuals living in a place of Darkness consciously avoid confronting reality? In your view, what is gained and what is lost from this approach to life?
6. *Lupe told me things I wanted to hear. It didn't matter if they were true or not.* (p.60)

Why might Wolfboy be interested in stories which might not be true? Answer this with reference to your knowledge about Wolfboy's past, particularly information given in chapters 8 and 10.

7. Doctor Gregory is a larger-than-life figure displayed on billboards peering out over Shyness. *A large photo of the ubiquitous Doctor Gregory decorates the outside.* (p.86) What is his role? What does he represent?

EXTENTION WORK: Examine the similarities to Big Brother from Orwell's 1984.

8. Using the information provided in chapters 8 and 9, write an entry for your Lonely Planet Guide under the heading of 'Tarsiers'.
9. The Kidds form a gang under the authority of Elf, himself a youngster aged about 14 or 15. Explore the following issues related to gangs:
 - Why do people join gangs?
 - Why do gangs yield so much power?
 - Why might it be hard to leave a gang?
 - Examine Elf's power over Babe. What can you deduce about the role of gang leaders?
10. Guadalupe is able to read the future using a method of reading veins on the forearm. Her caravan provides a refuge for Wolfboy and Wildgirl after their attack. She says: 'There's a circle around the van...No one can enter without my say so.' (p.76) What is it about Guadalupe that encourages trust and exudes a sense of security and safety?

11. In chapter 11, Wolfboy presents some of the theories behind the Darkness. Examine them all and either justify the one which seems the most plausible to you or write your own. If the Darkness is purely a metaphor, explain the metaphor. What sort of 'Darkness' can engulf a community or a population?
12. Wildgirl opens up to Lupe. *I told Lupe everything. I didn't mean to, but as soon as we were alone I suddenly wanted to.* (p.100) Write all you know of Wildgirl's past. Examine both her home life and her school life.
13. Wildgirl garners information from Paul using a trick she learned from 'the shrink'. *No judgments, no reactions and no curiosity* (p.103) Why do you suppose this method is successful?

Chapters 13–18

Read the chapters and then answer the following questions:

1. Chapter 13 focuses on the depth of Wolfboy's sadness. Examine the following:
 - *I feel so heavy it wouldn't surprise me if I never moved from this place, if I turned into concrete myself...* (p.107)
 - *...if I had more to offer than just sadness, if I didn't feel so tired from the weight of the entire world pressing down on me...* (p.116)
 - *Imagine all your worst fears surfacing. Imagine coughing up razor blades. Imagine not being able to stop the pain from coming out and not knowing when its going to end.* (p.110)

Using these threads, can you explain why Wolfboy stays in a place of Darkness?

2. Look at the description of Wolfboy's home on pages 120 to 122. Using the information given, imagine the house in its heyday, when Gram, Wolfboy and his parents lived there before the Darkness. Write a few paragraphs for your Lonely Planet guide book under the section you have already created called 'History of Shyness'.
3. Focusing on chapter 14, what evidence is there that once you are part of the gang of Kidds free choice is sacrificed?
4. In chapter 15, Wolfboy and Wildgirl ride to Orphanville. What evidence is there which indicates that Wolfboy is haunted by memories of his past?
5. Find the story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff in a book of fairy stories or Google it. With chapter 17 clearly in mind, examine both the similarities and differences between the two stories. Why do you think Hall used this story as the basis for this 'attack' on Wolfboy and Wildgirl?
6. Gather the information provided on Peter Kouros. Write his story as an article for the local newspaper.

Chapters 19–23

Read these chapters and answer the questions which follow:

1. Piece together the events surrounding Gram's death. In what way might staying in Shyness bring comfort to Wolfboy? Can a person effectively run away from tragedy? Explain your answer.
2. Wolfboy and Wildgirl are on a dangerous expedition to retrieve a cigarette lighter. What is it about the lighter that makes this mission so important? Justify your answer using material from the text.
3. *It must seem so cool to the Kidds, getting to live together with no parents and no adults and no one telling you what to do.* (p.171)
The Kidds have established a world without apparent adult control or adult input. Write a creative story in which there are no adults. Examine what the world might be like.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Read *Lord of the Flies*.

Discuss Golding's message regarding the essence of human nature and life without adults in a position of power. Do you think that Golding's prediction is realistic? Why? Why not?

4. Using the information provided, draw the map of Orphanville.
5. The car which arrives in Orphanville carries adults who appear to be doing a financial deal with the kids.
 - *There's more going on in Orphanville than we suspected* (p.180)
 - *It makes sense doesn't it that there are adults involved* (p.180)

From the hints given in chapter 21, write a few paragraphs explaining the political machinations of Orphanville.

6. Wolfgirl remembers, *be careful what you wish for.* (p.177)
Explain this phrase in light of the events of the night.
7. Wolfgirl is angry at Wolfboy for putting himself in such proximity to danger. *I don't have a death wish,* he assures Wolfgirl. (p.179) What is a death wish?

EXTENSION WORK: Examine the soliloquies of *Hamlet* in which he contemplates death. *Oh that this too, too solid flesh...* (Act 1 scene 2) and *To be or not to be* (Act 3 scene 1) Discuss them with your teacher and explore the idea of a death wish.

8. Building seven is described as *a real-life Escher drawing.* (p.188)
Research the art work of Escher and choose one picture on which to base an imaginative story set in the fantasy world of your chosen graphic.
9. In what way is the choice of which floor to press in the elevator like a game of Russian Roulette?

EXTENSION WORK: Read the short story *The Last Spin* by Ed McBain/Evan Hunter (available online), which explores a game of Russian Roulette played amongst leaders of a gang of youths. Discuss this story in your class, focusing on the power of the gang and the game of Russian Roulette. Write an obituary for the fledgling relationship between the protagonists.

10. Unlike Wolfboy, Wildgirl understands that keeping in touch with something from the world before the Darkness might be comforting. Can you explain why this might be so?
11. As Wolfboy and Wildgirl stand together under the stars with a panoramic view of the world beyond Shyness, Wolfgirl holds Wolfboy's hand and says *This is all we have, just this. Just now.* (p.205)

Look at Bruce Dawe's poem *Homo Suburbensis* in which the ordinary man recognises that his land, his home and the smells of his surroundings are that which define him and make him who he is. Find the parallels between this poem and this moment in the story.

Chapters 24- 29

Read these chapters and answer the questions that follow:

1. Wildgirl describes the apartment in which she lives: *All around us there are hundreds of other people living in apartments exactly the same as ours. Everyone stacked on top of each other.* (p. 212)

Using this description and also using John Brack's painting *Collins St., 5pm*, write an essay which presents your view on 'modern living'.

2. From the details given on page 216 regarding Ortolan and Gram's relationship, what do you believe is the likely reason behind Gram's suicide? Link this scenario to that of Wolfgirl's and her father.
3. What is meant by the phrase *The truth hurts but not knowing the truth hurts more?* (p.217)
4. Doctor Gregory is clearly involved with the Kidds. Using the information in chapters 25 and 28, explain the way the operation actually works. Who else is involved? Who makes the money? Who is exploited? What might be the motivation behind the operation? Why might Doctor Gregory be so keen on recruiting Wolfboy? How does this revelation regarding adult collusion demonstrate the phrase *The more things change, the more they stay the same?*
5. The bullying that Wolfgirl experienced made her feel inadequate so that she doubted herself. Discuss the power of bullying to change the life of an individual.

EXTENSION WORK: Debate the topic:
That bullying exists because there always those who are prepared to be victims

Chapter 30-32

1. *Maybe I'm like the Japanese fisherman who parties on the bottom of the ocean with the beautiful princess for three nights only to return to the surface and discover sixty years has passed.* (p.258)

Has it really been just one night? (p.266)

Both Wildgirl and Wolfboy have experienced more than just an adventure during their 24 hours together in Shyness. They have learned about themselves and each other. What have they discovered? Make use of the information in the letter that Wildgirl writes to Wolfboy as well as other hints in these chapters.

2. What do you think Wolfboy is about to learn from Ortolan?
3. Why does Wildgirl consider leaving without saying goodbye? What does she fear?

Points to consider:

– *It's not possible to trust anyone in the world. We're all here to take care of ourselves and ourselves only.* (p.29)

– *When it comes down to it, we're all on our own.* (p.29)

This is Wildgirl's view of life when she first arrives in Shyness. After spending 24 hours with Wolfboy, how might this view have altered for both of the protagonists? What has happened to lead to this change?

4. Leanne Hall alternates the narrative voice, sometimes telling the story from Wolfboy's perspective and sometimes from the perspective of Wildgirl. What is achieved by this? How would the story have been altered had the narrator been a third-person storyteller? Provide a specific example from the text.
5. Wolfgirl has trouble understanding how things work in Shyness. She says: *There are different rules around here, things going on that I know nothing about...* (p.32)

To what extent does this prove to be true? To what extent is this a narrow view of society and relationships?

6. What is metaphor? What is an extended metaphor? How might this book be understood as an extended metaphor?

EXTENSION WORK: Look at the picture book *The Island* by John Heffernan. Explain the extended metaphor. How might this book be linked to *This Is Shyness*?