

Queen of the Night

Leanne Hall

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Recommended for Secondary School

Resource Kit Contains

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Praise for *This Is Shyness* (Book 1)

'*This Is Shyness* is a delicious dance of seduction. But this book is so much more than a love story... Refreshingly original, Hall's debut novel has a genuine edge. It's *Bladerunner* meets *Peter Pan* with a bit of sweetness, sadness and tension.' *Sunday Age*

'Wolfboy and Wildgirl are compelling creations and the story is so strong and vividly imagined it's almost a graphic novel. Verdict: don't be shy.' *Herald Sun*

'In a suburb that never sees the sun it is easy to feel as though the world is nothing more than a dream, easy to believe that monsters do exist. But in the darkness there can also be found a sense of freedom, deeper understanding and total acceptance. In the darkness can also be found love.' *I Read Therefore I Am*
<http://larissabookgirl.livejournal.com/51569.html>

'Hall has created a fantastical world, with frightening elements of the surreal in her portrayal of bleak, industrial landscapes. Her prose is spiked with original, violent metaphors.' *Australian Book Review*

'It's not surprising that this book won the Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing. It's original; it's edgy; it skirts the borders of fantasy while being anchored in the real world, and it's totally absorbing. The long night is over, but we know the story continues. More please.' *Good Reading*

Synopsis

For six months Nia (Wildgirl) has tried to forget Wolfboy, the mysterious, beautiful boy she spent one night with in Shyness—the boy who said he'd call but didn't. There's a lot to distract her: a job in a vintage clothing store, her

final year at school, and her mum has started taking a close interest in what she is up to.

But then Wolfboy calls. The things he tells her pull her back to the suburb of Shyness, to the dark side of town where the sun doesn't rise, and dreams and reality are difficult to separate. And Nia decides to become Wildgirl once more.

In Shyness, tarsier monkeys are dropping dead from the sky, the gangs of marauding Kidds have inexplicably lost their mojo, the very Darkness itself seems not quite as dark as it once was, and Wolfboy's niece, Diana, is worrying her mother with stories of talking to animals. At the same time, Wolfboy's heartbroken friend Paul is hanging out with the blue people, a new subculture in the strange world of Shyness. As Wolfboy and Wildgirl bicker about the past and learn to trust each other again, they discover that the blue people are connected to the Datura Institute, run by Wolfboy's old nemesis Doctor Gregory—and that the doctor is peddling medicine that will enable people to sleep longer and longer. In exchange, it is reported, he is taking their dreams.

When Paul slips into a catatonic dream state, Wolfboy and Wildgirl seek the help of the Queen of the Night, a young girl who specialises in nocturnal and medicinal plants. She agrees to help Wildgirl undertake a dangerous rescue mission within Paul's dreams. But Paul has been getting his dream-inducing drugs from Dr Gregory, and they don't know just how dangerous entering Paul's dreams will be.

Wildgirl rescues Paul only to find out that Diana may be in danger from the dark forces that work in Shyness. But their fears are allayed, and Wolfboy and Wildgirl are free to be together.

Queen of the Night is a story about the impossibility of recreating the past, and the pain of facing up to reality, about finding the truth when you can't quite see clearly. It's a story about Wolfboy and Wildgirl and how they fit into each other's lives, and how the Darkness no longer sets them free.

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

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/>

Themes

Identity

1. *'Any illusion I'd had that he was like any of the other boys I know is drifting away in the night.'* (Pg 95)

Wolfboy and Nia both struggle to come to terms with their identity in *Queen of the Night*. Wolfboy, in particular, has long been confused by his wolf-like symptoms and what they mean, and worries about being 'different' to other people. He is unwilling to embrace the animalistic side of his nature and is horrified by some of the more wolfish locals: *'Recent howl aside, I am not this guy. I couldn't become this guy.'* (Pg 117)

Wolfboy is drawn into Doctor Gregory's world not just to save Paul, but because the doctor professes to know about Wolfboy's changing physicality, which he calls the 'Night Sickness'. Ask the class to consider how much they think Wolfboy's 'condition' is simply normal adolescent physical transformation, and how much of it is supernatural.

Is it possible that Wolfboy's symptoms are a physical manifestation of his inability to deal with anger, aggression, and grief?

2. Have the students read the passages at the velodrome, when the Gentleman tells Jethro:

'This isn't an illness, Jethro. It's a gift, a privilege.' (Pg 195)

'Every one of those ordinary yokel Locals that come to my fights on a Sunday night, who throw their hard-earned cash at my fighters, they want to be us. We are part of the night. More than they are, and they know it. The night makes us. I don't need Doctor Gregory's money, and I don't want a cure.' (Pg 196)

What do you think? Are the physical changes an illness, as Dr Gregory suggests, or a privilege?

Resilience

1. *'I promise not to let life beat me the way it did him.'* (Pg 62)

Resilience is a strong theme running through the book. The characters are trying to find their own way to live, by their own values, while dealing with adults who have their own agendas and expectations.

What mechanisms do Jethro and Nia develop to help deal with the challenges that life throws at them? Why are they able to overcome some of their setbacks when family members (Wolfboy's brother Gram) and friends are not?

2. Lupe says to Jethro: *'Sometimes you have to let the world end, so you can build a new one.'* (Pg 56)

What do you think she means by this?

Relationships

1. *'If you don't promise anyone anything then you can't disappoint them.'* (Pg 61)

Early in the novel Wolfboy lets down those closest to him. Have the class give two examples of this, and explain how both of these problems could have been resolved through better communication.

Depression/Sadness

1. *'This blackness inside,' she says, thumping my chest. 'You think you are trying to get rid of it, but you hold on more than ever.'* (Pg 57)

The Darkness in *Shyness* is a metaphor for the sadness and depression that can engulf people.

The inhabitants of *Shyness* use a variety of means to escape the Darkness—from getting high on sugar, to trance music, dreaming and fighting. Have the students write a paragraph on the Kidds, the blue people and the wolf people, describing the ways in which they try to dull the blackness.

- 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?
- Wolfboy mentions his howling as being something uncontrollable that rumbles up from deep within him. Have the class read the description of his howl on Page 109 and discuss why they think it happens then, and what they think it represents.
- Using examples from the text, have students list the reasons why Wolfboy may be depressed. Track the changes that occur throughout the book that seem to make it difficult for him to howl.
- 'What if it's the bad stuff inside people that makes the Darkness? What if we're the cause, not the result?' (Pg 84)

As a class, discuss whether they believe that it is the sadness of the inhabitants of Shyness that creates the darkness, or whether they are depressed because of the Darkness.

Responsibility

- In *This Is Shyness* Wolfboy and Wildgirl lived out an escapist fantasy: they discarded their histories and allowed each other the freedom to be someone else for one night. In *Queen of the Night*, they are forced to negotiate their relationship afresh, and consider if and how they fit into each other's day-to-day lives. Their actions take place within a framework of responsibility: to their parents or family, friends, school and work. Have the class brainstorm the responsibilities that Nia and Jethro have, and how they define their personalities.
- 'All the big Kidds left Orphanville and they wouldn't tell us why. Someone stole all our bikes. There's no food, and the sugar stash is all gone. Building Six caught on fire. No one tells us what to do.' (Pg 50)

In what ways do the absence of adults and authority figures create a void in Shyness?

- How does Hall use the lack of adults to move the storyline forward? Provide specific examples.

Dreams

It is revealed in *Queen of the Night* that there is a mysterious institute that seems to be collecting the dreams of the inhabitants of Shyness. Nia and Jethro discover the Datura Institute, run by Doctor Gregory. Those who go to the clinic—referred to as 'the blue people'—are mostly insomniacs so desperate for sleep that they will sell their dreams in order to buy sleep.

- Read the first description of the blue people on Page 31. Discuss what the class thinks is the matter with them, and what the woman dressed in blue means when she says: 'slippage'.

- 'Dreams are windows onto people's desire—desires they try to keep secret, or even desires they didn't know they had. And if you know a man's desires, then you can make him do anything.' (Pg 187)

What do you think Doctor Gregory means by this? Why do you think he wants this control over people?

- Blake is referring to the Datura Institute when she says 'they take his dreams away' about Sanjay (Pg 172).

Discuss the ways in which the institute does this in a wider, less literal sense.

Structure

Narration in *Queen of the Night* switches between Jethro and Nia. Look at the different ways stories are written—in first person, third person, etc—and the effect this has on how the reader identifies with the characters.

Discuss whether this literary device helps or hinders the development of the story.

Does the story feel as though one character is more important than the other?

Language

Metaphor

Shyness itself operates as a metaphor: for embracing the darker aspects of life and human nature or turning away from it. There are those who choose darkness, those who flee from it, those who are inert, those who are exiled.

- Examine what a metaphor is, and have the class read other examples of metaphors in poetry and stories. Discuss how the whole book can be read as an extended metaphor.

Symbolism

- Think about the names that Hall gives her characters and locations. Have the class consider the following names and write about why they think Hall chose them:

- Shyness
- Wolfboy
- Queen of the Night
- Birds In Winter (look up the meaning of Ortolan)
- Diabetic Hotel
- Umbra club

- The Datura plant features prominently in the book. Research the plant and its medicinal properties.

Why do you think Hall chose that particular plant as the name and logo of the institute?

Genre

Shyness is a town that feels like a regular, run-down industrial suburb, but with a fantastical twist. Would you consider *Queen of the Night* to be a tale of fantasy or reality? Can it be both? Provide evidence for your view, taking into account the location, the characters and the storyline.

Context

1. 'Shyness is a unique environment, Jethro. A battlefield in one way, a Petri dish in another.' (Pg 189)

Discuss with the class what they think this statement means. An essay question could expand this quote into an examination of the characters, themes and the wider context of the novel.

2. Shyness is populated with interesting characters—the Kidds, the ghostniks, the Dreamers, the blue people and those with 'Night Sickness'. Have the students write a paragraph explaining who each of these groups is and how they fit into the fabric of Shyness.
3. It is revealed on Page 156 that there have been other periods of darkness in Shyness before, the last from 1857–1864. Talk about how this time seems to have been forgotten, and why this might have happened. Was it because most people left? Because no one wanted it recorded?
4. As an extension, have students consider other places that have been defined by their pasts. If the history of a place is dark and unpleasant should it be remembered or forgotten? Why?
5. Has the class read the first book, *This Is Shyness*? Have them discuss how having read it or not changed or influenced the way that they read *Queen of the Night*.

Ethics and Morals

Nia's mother answers Nia's phone and tells Wolfboy not to call again after Nia stays out all night with him (in *This Is Shyness*). Get the class to debate whether they think her actions were justifiable, given she was concerned for her daughter's safety.

In order to escape further into his dreams, Paul betrays Wolfboy by giving Dr Gregory information about him. Discuss whether you feel that Paul is responsible for his actions. Consider this in a wider context of drug use and dependency.

Characters

Nia/Wildgirl

Nia is a responsible and street-smart young woman. Since being introduced in *This Is Shyness*, she has already changed her life in positive ways: reengaging with her mother, changing schools to deal with bullying, and starting a new job. She seems like a fairly regular girl, and when Jethro sees her again, he feels that the name Wildgirl doesn't seem to fit her anymore—that it belongs to the first night they spent together. Considering the adventures that unfold in the book, is the name Wildgirl an apt one for Nia?

Jethro/Wolfboy

Wolfboy lives in Shyness and exhibits some strange wolf-like characteristics. He feels caught between trying to be normal and embracing his wild side. He needs to find out what parts of himself he must accept and what parts he can change through his will and growing wisdom.

'Doctor Gregory thinks I'm like this because I'm crazy. The howling, the hair, the appetite, the growth spurt, the muscles—all due to what's going on in my mind.' (Pg 31)

1. Lately, these changes seem to be diminishing: 'I don't feel as hairy-scary anymore. Or, at the very least, whatever was happening to me has slowed down.' (Pg 6) What has happened to Wolfboy that might have slowed the changes down?
2. How do the choices that Wolfboy makes set him apart from the other residents of Shyness (the Dreamers, blue people and fighters)? Consider his relationship with Ortolan and Diana, Nia and Blake in your response.

Doctor Gregory

Doctor Gregory is a larger-than-life character who appears to control what goes on in Shyness.

1. Ask the class whether they believe Doctor Gregory is responsible for the changes that are happening in Shyness, using the text to provide examples of these changes.
2. Also, it is revealed that Doctor Gregory watches Jethro and has had a previous altercation with him. What might be Dr Gregory's motives for watching Jethro?
3. Once the students have finished reading the book, discuss whether their feelings about Dr Gregory have changed at all. Discuss whether they believe that Dr Gregory is 'the worst Shyness has to offer'. (Pg 10)
4. Extension work: Have the class make some parallels to Doctor Gregory and Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Paul

Paul has been Wolfboy's closest friend since kindergarten. The reader finds out that for the past few months he has been avoiding Wolfboy and has had his heart broken by Ingrid. As Lupe says, *'Our Paul is like a lost puppy trying to find a family.'* (Pg 35)

Paul gets involved with the Datura Institute in order to forget his pain and relive his relationship with Ingrid. *'Paul is unhealthily fixated on the past. He wants to cycle through the same events, again and again.'* (Pg 186)

1. How is living in the past shown to be a poor substitute for real life?

Diana

Diana is Jethro's niece. She is Ortolan and Gram's daughter, and one of the reasons that Jethro now feels part of a family again. Throughout the book, it is hinted that she is also different from regular people.

1. What clues does Hall give throughout the book that Diana might have special powers?

Dreamers. Again, ask the class if they imagine this type of music to sound like anything they have heard.

4. Diana draws a picture of herself flying. Child psychologists often use children's drawings as a means of assessing them. Ask the class to research a little about this, and what different colours and motives in children's pictures mean. Then have them read the description of Diana's picture on Pages 157–159 and ask them to assess it from a child psychologist's point of view. A starting off point for class research could be this website: <http://www.lovingyourchild.com/2010/07/child-drawing-psychology/>

Literary Activities

1. Ask the students to imagine a third book about Shyness and then write the opening chapter or two. Will the Darkness have lifted? Will the main protagonists still be Jethro and Nia?
2. Lupe refers to the story of Henny Penny. Look at the tale of Henny Penny and see if you can draw some parallels with Shyness. Look at other fables and stories that use metaphors to comment on aspects of human nature.

Artistic Interpretations

1. Read the song lyrics that Wolfboy sings on Pages 80–81. The song refers to meeting Nia and the night they spent together in Shyness in the first book. Discuss the lyrics and the tone of the song, and how Wolfboy changes the pace of the song halfway through to make it more of a lament. Ask the students what bands or style of music they think that the Long Blinks sound like. Ask them to bring in examples of a similar style of music or song and talk about why their chosen song reminds them of Wolfboy's band.
2. Have the students write song lyrics about the events in Queen of the Night. This could be in any style they choose, but ask them to consider the tone of the novel and emotions of the characters when writing the lyrics.
3. Dreamer rock is a popular type of music in Shyness. Read Nia's description of it and discuss why this type of music fits perfectly with the character of the