



# The Road to Winter

## MARK SMITH

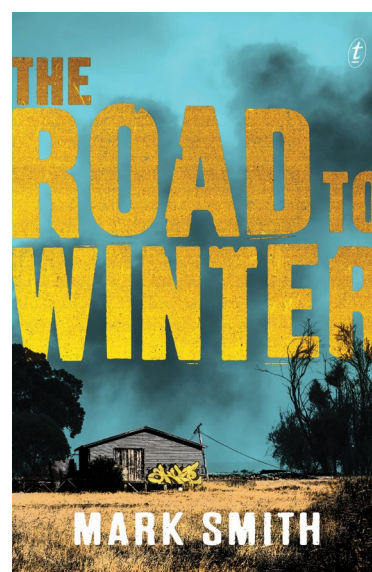
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### TEXT'S TEACHING NOTES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.

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

### SYNOPSIS

'I want to say it's not fair. I want to say we're only kids and we shouldn't have to deal with this stuff, that there should be more adults like Ray to help us.' (p.219)

Finn is alone in Angowrie, relying on his survival skills and affinity with the natural landscape to remain alive in a world torn apart by a deadly virus and threatened by violent gangs. Apart from his loyal dog, Rowdy, and contact with the elderly Ray, Finn's life is lonely. He keeps himself busy hunting and gathering, and surfing to keep his grief at bay. Rose, a Siley, pursued by the brutal Ramage and his Wilders gang, arrives and Finn's life is once again thrown out of balance. He needs to draw on every ounce of resilience and initiative to help find Rose's missing sister, Kas. Along the way, Finn's encounters with characters who represent the best and worst of humanity teach him much about the adult world of prejudice, violence and self-interest, as well as bravery, honour, kindness and love. Finn's journey of courage and survival in a harsh social and natural environment provides many valuable lessons on life for the reader.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

I decided to write *The Road To Winter* after talking to a class of Year 9 boys before viewing the film of John Marsden's *Tomorrow When The War Began*. None of them had heard of the book and very few among them read at all unless they were required to as part of the curriculum. With this in mind I wanted to write a book that would appeal to YA readers in a way that would both encourage them to read and engage them in a thrilling story. I didn't specifically write it for boys—there are equally strong female characters—but I wanted it to be a page-turner written from the perspective of a boy they could relate to. Finn has all the insecurities of a teenager but also the resilience I think many adolescent boys are capable of demonstrating.



I also wanted to highlight issues of concern to YA readers—friendship, loyalty, conflict and relationships. Having the two principal female characters—Kas and Rose—as escaped asylum seekers also allowed me to discuss this prescient issue without beating young readers over the head with it.

Lastly, I have lived on the coast for more than 35 years and the ocean and its environs have influenced me deeply. Hence Finn is a surfer, a swimmer and a diver—a boy who grows up by the beach, who understands the moods of the ocean and who respects its power. Every surfer worth their salt (pardon the pun) can tell you at any time of day which way the wind is blowing, whether the tide is rising or falling and how the banks are setting up at their favourite break. When all the chaos breaks out around Finn, the place he feels the most at home, the place he feels safest, is in the water.

### BEFORE READING

- Explore students' understanding of Australia's response to asylum seekers. Find some contrasting points of view to consider in class discussion. (ACELA1721) L S LY
  - Examine an online topographic map of the Great Ocean Road area of Victoria, looking for features such as small towns, main roads, tracks, rivers, valleys and other geographical elements. Ask students to work out the route they would take, without a car, from either Anglesea or Lorne to get to the Cape Otway Road to the north. (ACELT1629) W L R S LT
  - Explain to students that they will shortly begin studying a text about human behaviour in the face of adversity. Ask them to discuss in groups what personal attributes and behaviours are most important for survival in a time of crisis. (ACELA1804) L S LA
  - Discuss why disaster and personal loss can cause a change in individual and group morality. Think of specific situations where people's morals could be tested. What implications could there be for society when conflict arises because of different moral stances? (ACELY1719) L S W LY
  - Put a sign up at either end of the classroom, one that reads 'Agree' and the other 'Disagree' in order to create a spectrum. Have students stand in the middle of the room and explain that you will read a series of statements that each relate to a theme/idea from *The Road to Winter*. They should move to the side of the room that best corresponds with their opinion of each statement. At the end of the activity, discuss with students what they have learned from the exercise. (ACELY1730) L S LY
    - Trust is the most important aspect in a relationship.
    - There's always something good in everyone.
    - It is possible to live without the Internet, phones, television and radio.
  - The best of people put the needs of others before their own needs.
  - People require companionship in order to live a happy life.
  - Everyone should learn how to fend for him or herself in the outdoors.
  - While reading
- Consider what you learn about Finn in the first chapter. What is your initial response to the words, 'before the virus'? Why do you think law and order have fallen away? What do the changing weather patterns suggest to you? Who could the Wilders be? Describe the relationship between Finn and Rowdy. What do you suspect about the role of the girl Finn encounters at the end of the chapter? (ACELT1621) L R S LT
  - How does the author create tension in Chapter 2 as Finn and Rose escape? Comment on the description of the physical landscape and how a sense of both stillness and movement is created. How are Finn's strong observational skills made clear? (ACELA1545) L R S LA
  - When Finn and Rose first speak, what do you notice about the interaction between them? Why is Finn concerned about bringing Rose to the house? (ACELT1620) L R S LT
  - What is a Siley? How has the author re-imagined the current asylum seeker situation in Australia? How is Rose's attachment to Kas made clear? What do Finn and Rose have in common? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
  - 'Something about the way she looks, the way she talks. She's no threat.' (p.39) Why does Finn's intuition tell him he can trust Rose? What is her reaction when Finn shows her the garage? (ACELT1622) L R S LT
  - 'I did some things I'm not proud of.' (p.47) How do Rose's words reflect the wider plot of the text? (ACELT1637) L R S LT
  - 'I close my eyes and breathe in the smell of people, the smell of a home.' (p.129) Why is this Finn's reaction to Harry's and Stella's home? What words and phrases highlight that it is a 'home'? (ACELT1621) W R LT
  - What purpose do the frequent references to the north and the south serve? (ACELT1803) L R S LT
  - Rose describes Kas as 'fierce'. (p.49) How do the sisters describe each other? Does Finn end up agreeing with them? (ACELY1723) R LY
  - Reread page 108 when Finn does everything in his power to stop Ramage. Why does he decide not to kill Ramage and what does this reveal about his character? Compare this passage to Finn's discovery of the man killed by Rose. (ACELA1542) R LA



16. At what stages of the novel are Finn and Rose, and later Finn and Kas, able to indulge in normal teenage chat? Why are these moments so important? (ACELY1722) 🗣️🌐🌐 R LY
17. 'It keeps me sane. I don't say what else I'm thinking: *that it's about the only thing I do that isn't about staying alive.*' (p.55) What is Finn referring to here? Each time Finn surfs or swims in the ocean, the tone and language choices of the writer differ from the language in the scenes of tension and brutality. Reread these passages and find examples of similes, personification and carefully chosen verbs and adjectives. (ACELT1620) 🗣️🌐🌐 L R S LT
18. '...I never thought there'd be someone else on my side – someone I'd want to fight for.' (p.98) There are a number of examples of taking, or not taking, sides in the novel. Consider why the author emphasises this idea. (ACELT1620) 🗣️🌐🌐 L R S LT
19. 'Most have died, I reckon. You've done a bloody good job just to stay alive.' (p.122) Explain this statement. (ACELT1620) 🗣️🌐🌐 W R LT
20. Reread pages 131-135. Consider how language and tone are used to create tension and show the different viewpoints of Harry and Tusker. Carefully note how the other people in the room are influenced by the words of each of them. (ACELY1721) 🗣️🌐🌐 W R LY
21. Harry insists on Finn telling him the truth: 'No more lies.' (p.138) How does Finn's revelation of the truth link with other elements of the plot? (ACELT1620) 🗣️🌐🌐 R LT
22. Rose's determination to remove the tracking device from her hand ultimately leads to her death. What is the significance of her self-inflicted wound and how does it influence Finn's actions? What does she mean when she says, 'At least it's one I can see'? (p.73) (ACELT1620) 🗣️🌐🌐 L R S LT
23. Discuss students' reactions upon reading Ramage's response to Rose's death. Do they feel surprised, confused, revolted, etc? What theories do they have about Ramage's ability to track the teenagers down each time? (ACELT1627) 🗣️🌐🌐 L R S LT
24. 'I'm going to hunt him down and kill him.' (p.229) Do these words from Kas surprise the reader? Discuss whether Kas is justified in this response and also comment on her determination to reclaim Hope. (ACELT1627) 🗣️🌐🌐 L R S LT
26. What events have shaped the characters of Rose and Kas? Consider how and why readers might respond differently to each sister. Decide on three quotes which best represent each girl. 🗣️
27. 'I can't leave them to fight on their own.' (p.151) What does this quote demonstrate about Finn's character? Also discuss why Stella entrusts Willow's care to Finn and Kas. What has she understood about their characters? (ACELT1621) 🗣️🌐🌐 R LT
28. 'What's wrong with people in this country, Finn? Even before the virus it was so beautiful here; you had everything. But you were so cruel.' (p.198) Reread Kas's conversation with Finn on this page. What do her words demonstrate about her character and her outlook on life? (ACELT1621) 🗣️🌐🌐 R LT
29. 'We're a team, the two of us.' (p.4) How does Rowdy complement Finn's character? Does Kas's affinity with Yogi add further understanding of her character? Ask students to discuss why the bonds between animals and humans can be so significant. Do animals have their own character? (ACELT1620) 🗣️🌐🌐 R LT
30. Finn's father dies as a result of trying to prevent the looting of the supermarket. What clues does the reader gain about Finn's father's character? What elements of his father's character are reflected in Finn? Which other character represents the opposite of Finn's father. Which character is the most similar (other than Finn)? (ACELT1807) 🗣️🌐🌐 W R LT
31. At what point in the novel does the reader begin to realise that the female characters are presented in a different light from the males? Provide specific examples to support your ideas. 🗣️
32. Discuss why Finn breaks down and cries in front of Harry, Tusker and Jack on page 118. How does this position the reader to feel about Finn?
33. How does Finn change and mature throughout the novel? What is responsible for this growth? (ACELT1627) 🗣️🌐🌐 W R LT
34. Consider the role Ray plays in the novel. Use evidence from the text to support your response. (ACELY1734) 🗣️🌐🌐 W L R S LY
35. There are a number of 'good' characters whose actions are crucial to the plot. Which adult characters prove to be the most admirable? Provide specific examples. (ACELY1723) 🗣️🌐🌐 W R LY

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

25. Construct a map of the major characters in the novel. Be sure to group characters according to families/clans so that the relationships between them are clear. Include the Wilders, Ramage's gang, the valley people, the Swan's Marsh people, the Sileys, the drifters, Finn, Ray, Rose, Kas, etc. (ACELY1723) 🗣️ W R LY

36. 'The girl's a Siley. She's got no rights. She's our property now.' (p.133) Discuss how prejudice against the Siley's is represented in the novel. What types of characters are likely to be the most unsympathetic to the asylum seekers? Find several examples to support your view. (ACELY1733) 🗣️🌐🌐 R LY
37. 'It's like we're doing some sort of weird dance, trying to avoid each other but not really wanting to.' (p.191) Explain the relationship between Finn



and Kas and comment on how their relationship changes. (ACELT1627) L R S LT

38. Make a list of quotes that represent Ramage's character. How is language and action used to portray him as dangerous? Is the level of brutality used to depict Ramage justifiable? (ACELT1621) W R LT

### STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- The novel is written from only Finn's perspective. How does this shape the reader's understanding of the unfolding storyline? (ACELA1553) R LA
- The physical landscape, as well as the local flora and fauna – and the weather, are an essential part of the novel. Find specific examples where the interactions between humans and their surroundings add to the power of the story. (ACELA1553) R LA
- Comment on the use of italics in the novel. (ACELA1556) L R S LA
- Create a map detailing the different settings of the novel: Angowrie, Ray's place, Longley and the feedstore, the valley farm, etc.) Now add in the routes that Finn takes in his quest to find Kas and protect Rose. Use another colour to show the locations where Ramage and his gang turn up in the story. What point is the author making about the advantages of closely knowing a local area. (ACELT1622) W R LT
- Consider the juxtaposition between life and death in the novel. Why does the author end with both a birth and a death? (ACELY1733) W L S R LY
- Comment on the author's possible reasons for not giving a title to each chapter. Examine how each chapter starts and ends. Can any pattern be observed? (ACELA1553)
- The author has used fictional locations and not specifically referred to Victoria or Australia in the novel. Does this decision affect the reader's response to the story? How does the reader know the setting actually is Australia? (ACELA1553)
- Discuss the author's use of the ocean as a metaphor for Finn's sanity. Finn refers to everything being 'out of balance' in his life. Locate the references to 'balance' in the novel and consider why this term is used. (ACELA1553)
- There are several recurring symbols in the novel. What are they? Explain their significance to the overall story. (ACELA15560) W R LA

### THEMES

#### Survival, Courage and Conflict

- 'I didn't know it at the time, but everything I learned back then would help me survive.' (p.3) What are the various strategies Finn uses to ensure his survival? (ACELT1807) L R S LT

- Rose and Kas, as Sileys, have endured a different fight for survival from Finn. Consider how life has been doubly tough for them. (ACELT1621) R LT
- Ramage's methods of survival are brutal and self-serving. How does Ramage survive? What observation is the author making about people like Ramage? (ACELT1620) L R S LT
- Harry admires Finn's capacity to fend for himself. How has the valley location helped Harry and his group to provide for themselves? Hypothesise as a class whether or not Harry and Stella survive the attack by Ramage's gang. (ACELY1723) R LY

#### The Environment

- How does Finn show his respect for the environment? How does he use the landscape and vegetation to his advantage? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- Develop a theory to explain why the animals appear to be unaffected by the virus. Consider if the author is deliberately focusing on human suffering. Why he might do this. (ACELT1771) L R S LT
- To what extent has the ocean and its marine life been affected by climate change? (ACELT1627) L R S LT

#### Community Interest vs Self-interest

- Reread the passage where the supermarket in Angowrie is looted. Analyse the reasons why people's moral compass has shifted. Compare Scully's response to that of Finn's father. (ACELT1620) L R S LT
- The valley community provides a contrast to the anarchy of the outside world. What is the purpose of the community meetings? Consider how Harry and Tusker differ in their responses to Finn and Kas. Find supporting quotes for your answer. (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- Which characters demonstrate the courage to stand up to those who seek to exploit others? Discuss which characters are the most loyal to others. (ACELT1771) R LT

#### Loss, Loneliness and Friendship

- How is language used in the novel to convey Finn's grief at losing his parents? (ACELY1721) R W LY
- Modern forms of communication have been lost since the devastation caused by the virus. Discuss the impact lack of communication and companionship has on Finn? What role does Ray play in Finn's life? (ACELT1621) L R S LT
- Why is Finn able to establish a close bond with both Rose and Kas? (ACELT1771) L R S LT
- Finn is not the only character to have lost loved ones. Which other characters have reason to grieve? How is this grief expressed? (ACELT1803) R LT



5. Why is the idea of a 'home' significant in the novel? Provide several examples. (ACELT1627) L R S LT

#### Truth, Trust and Secrets

1. 'You don't know anything about me. You don't know what I've done. You wouldn't like me if I told you.' (p.75) What enables Rose to trust Finn before she can trust him with some of her story? (ACELT1621) R LT
2. Why is it so important to Harry that Finn tells the truth? (ACELY1734) R LY
3. Discuss what the key secrets are in the novel. Do characters hold secrets of different kinds? (ACELT1803) L R S LT

#### RESPONDING

1. Who is the real hero in *The Road to Winter*? Justify your answer with evidence from the text. (ACELT1771) W R LT
2. There are many references in the novel to the 'feedstore'. How do these references create a constant feeling of discomfort for the reader? (ACELA1556) W R LT
3. How does *The Road to Winter* demonstrate the importance of initiative, resilience and loyalty to increase one's chances of survival? (ACELT1807) W R LT
4. 'I want to say it's not fair. I want to say we're only kids and we shouldn't have to deal with this stuff, that there should be more adults like Ray to help us.' (p.216) What has Finn learned about the adult world from his experiences in the novel? Discuss. (ACELT1771) W R S LT
5. How does Mark Smith's *The Road to Winter* demonstrate the human need for love and companionship? (ACELT1628) W R LT
6. Rewrite a section of the novel from the perspective of another character. Stay true to the events but develop a clear voice for the character and include their reactions to Finn. (ACELT1632) W R LY
7. *The Road to Winter* is primarily a speculative text about possible social changes in the future and the differing ways in which people will respond. What conventions of the genre does the novel adhere to? How is a sense of both present and future created by the author? What other genres does the novel draw upon? (ACELT1772) W R LT
8. What is the significance of the final stage of the novel? Discuss in relation to the novel's title, *The Road to Winter*, and consider why the arrival of winter is important in a literal and metaphorical sense for Finn and Kas. (ACELY1732) W R LY
9. With a partner create a storyboard for a sequel to *The Road to Winter*. In order to plan your story, list the major events, dilemmas and decisions that Finn, Kas, Willow and Ray will face in their quest to rescue Hope from Ramage. Students may present this in a multimodal form. (ACELY1736) W R S LY