



Afterlight

REBECCA LIM

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RECOMMENDED SCHOOL YEAR LEVEL: 9–10

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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.

STRANDS	LA – LANGUAGE LT – LITERATURE LY – LITERACY
MODES	W – WRITING L – LISTENING R – READING S – SPEAKING
GENERAL CAPABILITIES	LITERACY INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING NUMERACY ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR
CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES	SUSTAINABILITY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES ASIA AND AUSTRALIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIA

SYNOPSIS

Sophie switches schools in an attempt to start afresh after losing her parents in a tragic accident. Although desperate to be ordinary and anonymous, she is pursued by the ghost-like Eve who sends her on a series of missions that propel Sophie into a media frenzy as a 'psychic' hero. The bullies at school give Sophie a hard time but the enigmatic and handsome Jordan who possesses some paranormal skills of his own rescues her. As the story unfolds, Sophie and Jordan find themselves caught up in a sinister, violent world where life and death are intertwined. Questions are posed about family relationships, self-identity, bullying, the importance of kindness, media reporting and the magical mysteries of the afterlife. The novel requires more than one read to appreciate the interconnections between characters and the darkly humorous and witty observations of Sophie, the narrator.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Lim is a writer and illustrator based in Melbourne, Australia. She worked as a commercial lawyer for several years before leaving to write full time. Rebecca is the author of sixteen books for children and young adult readers, including *The Astrologer's Daughter* and *Afterlight*. An Aurealis Awards finalist, Rebecca's work has been longlisted for the Davitt Award for YA, the Gold Inky Award and the CBCA Book of the Year Award for Older Readers. Her novels have been translated into German, French, Turkish, Portuguese and Polish.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I write these slightly freaky young adult novels that feature empowered female characters living in fictional worlds that – as much as possible – resemble the real world I live in and not the one depicted in, say, *Neighbours*. So if you pick up one of my novels – no



matter if you're a three-year-old or an eighteen-year-old – you'll be met with young women from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds finding reserves of strength, ferocity, tenacity and adaptability in the face of great adversity. I'm not interested in presenting the lives of pretty people facing mildly perplexing personal conundrums. I don't know anyone like that.

We live in a dark and deeply complex world. The news is a potent trigger for a lot of my work. A few of my novels are fictional responses to some terrible abduction, cold-case and imprisonment stories that were emerging around the time I was writing the books. The things people do to each other in real life are staggering, and I write to try and make sense of questions like: *Why do bad things happen to good people? What happens to human energy, human consciousness, after death? Are we ruled by fate or by our own free will? Are we alone in the universe? How does one bad past act reverberate into the future?*

I read across many genres – literary, thriller, crime, mystery, YA, children's, poetry, romance, drama, history, biography – and I try to write the same way. My books have been described as 'genre mash-ups' by me and by other writers. Why just write a paranormal YA novel when it can also be a mystery/crime/contemporary/thriller with romance, Latin, demons and the Archangel of Death thrown in for good measure?

As a species, I think we want to believe that there's something more out there than this concrete reality we see and experience every day. For some, it may be science that fills that void, for others it may be faith, or a constantly shifting amalgam of the two. But many of us want there to be that 'something more'. So that's what I do – overlay reality with 'something more'. The paranormal element in my writing throws our humanity into stark relief. Often, the worst monsters in my fiction are human, not supernatural. Fantasy writing, for me, is more 'authentic' and powerful if it comes from a real and recognisable place before it goes 'off road'.

There is this perception going around that books written for children and young adults do not deal with sufficiently complex issues or do not seek to 'confront the full range of genuine human experience' in the way that books for adults aim to. In my own quiet way, every time I pick up a pen or fire up my computer, I refute that perception. I refute it with all my heart.

BEFORE READING

- Find out the title of the Robert Frost poem from which the author quotes at the start of the novel. Why might she have chosen to quote from this particular poem? (ACELT1812) R LT
- Undertake research about the underworld (p.134) grimoires (p.126), psychic abilities such as clairaudience (p.88) and psychics (p.33, 54, 64) and Norman French (p.134) in order to better understand some of the unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts to be encountered in the novel. (ACELT1560, ACELT1633) R LT
- Bullying, or the misuse of power against other people, is unfortunately a difficult problem to solve. Conduct a debate on the pros and cons of different anti-bullying strategies or write a speech that attempts to persuade students that kindness and tolerance towards others is more admirable than bullying and intimidation. (ACELT1812) R S LT

WHILE READING

- Consider the connotations of the title – *Afterlight*. What inferences or impressions are given to the reader of the existence of an 'afterlight' or other associations with the paranormal? (For example: p.1, 78-9, 133-9, 154, 169, 174-5, 191, 222) (ACELT1774) R LT
- Consider the following quotations. What is the underlying meaning of each line? (ACELT1774) R LT
 - 'I cried in public places and walked the streets around The Star after dark, practically begging to be murdered because the dark was where they were; they were nowhere in the light.' p.4
 - '...kind of illuminated from the inside, and in outline, like a freaking torch.' p.9
 - 'If there's oxygen up where she is, none of us are breathing it.' p.33
 - 'But I was like wallpaper. Like grass. No one at Ivy Street could ever remember a word I'd said after I said it.' p.33
- Why does Jordan avoid making contact with Sophie? What verbal and body language clues make it appear that he dislikes her? (ACELT1635) R LT
- How does the use of italic text alter the way we read particular words in the novel? For example: 'It's Norman French. It means gate keepers, guardians, the ones who stand between *them* and *the great unwary* – as he likes to call most people. Mastin, he says, have the ability to move between this world and *Sheol*.' (p.134) (ACELA1553, ACELA1556) R LA
- Why do you think the author uses a number of hyphenated words? (For example: beery-breathed (p.3), bile-yellow (p.7), Napoleon Perdis-abusing (p.32), fem-bots (p.34).) (ACELA1561) R LA
- Why do you think nicknames are used in the novel? (For example, Storkie, Fat, Flasher) Are they all used in an affectionate way? (ACELA1562) R LA
- 'Like no time at all had passed, Sharys reattached herself to the nerves of my left elbow, and fear began to take wing through my body again like a trapped bird.' (p.54) Sophie uses many words and phrases to describe her fearfulness in the novel. Select three examples and consider why the author chose those particular words. (ACELA1552) R LA
- Jordan, at first, is reluctant to engage with Sophie. What evidence is there to suggest this? What explanation does he later give to Sophie for his cold



behavior towards her? Pinpoint the turning point in their relationship. (p.36, 55-7, 59-60, 78, 80-82)

(ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT

9. Re-read pages 36-39 where Sophie is forcibly made to witness the bullying of Linda Jelly: 'A locked bathroom door usually signaled trouble...' to 'I knew who'd written that message.' How is Sophie feeling in this passage? What do you notice about sentence structure, descriptive language, tone and pace in this passage? (ACELT1635, ACELA1553) ⚙️ 📖 R LT LA
10. How does Sophie's voice in the novel change? What is the effect of the change on the reader? (For example: p.148-9) (ACELT1643) 📖 R LT
11. How does Sophie's view of Eve differ from the suggested reality of Monica's personality and life? (For example: p.192 and p.110-111) (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT
12. Sophie always puts herself down. Why do you think she does this? Do you find her analogy of herself to wallpaper or invisibility convincing? (ACELT1774) 📖 R LT
13. *Afterlight* is full of references to actual Melbourne suburbs and places. Use the references to locate places (Google Earth would be useful) where key incidents occur in the novel. Refer back to the Author's Note to help you understand why she has used real places in which to set the story. Complete this task in groups then explain your findings to the class. (ACELT1741, ACELT1749) ⚙️ R LT
14. What does Sophie's description of Dirty Neil tell us about what she thinks of him? (For example, on p.11, 79 and 124.) (ACELT1774) ⚙️ 📖 R LT
15. 'Like history repeating itself,' I'd mumbled, swallowing. 'Only Dad was no psycho, Gran. He got Mum out of the business the same way he got himself out. And I never heard them argue. Not once. He would sooner have turned a gun on himself, than on Mum. She was his life.' (p.6) How do Sophie's words suggest what sort of man her father was? What was 'the business'? (ACELT1774) ⚙️ 📖 R LT
16. Make a list of the unanswered questions in the novel. For example: How did O'Loughlin know that Sophie was at the Merri Creek park? Pair up with a friend and see if you can answer these questions? Does having unanswered questions in the back of your mind affect the way you read the novel? (ACELT1774) ⚙️ 📖 R LT
17. Rebecca Lim says she likes to write about young women 'finding reserves of strength, ferocity, tenacity and adaptability in the face of great adversity.' (Author's note) Find an example of each of these characteristics in Sophie. (ACELT1774) 📖 R LT
18. The novel's ending is deliberately ambiguous. How does the writer use structure and writing techniques to create this ambiguity as the novel draws to a close? What effect does it have on you as a reader? (ACELA1553) ⚙️ 📖 R LA

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. Despite both possessing mystical abilities, Sophie and Jordan are quite different personalities. Search through the novel and find evidence to suggest this. Where possible, use a quotation. (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT
2. The novel suggests that Sophie is more at ease with her ability to interact with Eve than Jordan. Do you agree? Justify your argument with evidence from the novel. (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT
3. We know a limited amount about Joss and Angel and their roles in this story. Create a version of events from their point of views. Consider how they might feel about what happens to Sophie. (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R W LT
4. How does Sophie's internal (thinking to herself) and external voice (speaking to others) differ? Why are both included in the novel? (ACELT1643) ⚙️ R LT
5. 'Gran stood looking at me for a moment more. "Just be careful," she said. "I don't know what you're up to and I don't want to know, but don't go putting yourself in harm's way, love."' (p.157) What sort of person is Gran presented as in the novel? Comment on her physical appearance, personality, attitude towards life and family, and also her attachment to The Star Hotel. (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT
6. The physical appearance and clothing of various characters are described in detail by the author. Select two characters and provide examples of their appearance and clothing. In groups, discuss your findings. (ACELA1561, ACELT1641) 📖 R LA LT
7. How is the character of Daughtry developed in *Afterlight*? The reader hears a lot about him before he makes a physical entry to the novel. By the time Daughtry appears, do you have suspicions about him or trust him completely? (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. What literary devices (such as metaphors, similes and personification) are used to create mood in the novel. Select three examples from the novel. (ACELA1553) 📖 R LA
2. The use of the senses (hearing, sight, smell and touch) to enhance the descriptive language of the novel is essential to Lim's style. Select three examples of each from the novel. (ACELA1553) 📖 R LA
3. What is the impact of starting a story after a key event (the death of Sophie's parents) has already occurred? (ACELA1553) 📖 R LA
4. Lim makes the choice to interweave the tragedies and violence of the novel with Sophie's quirky humour. Why do you think she does this? How does it alter the way we read the text? Would the novel have been more challenging to read without the humour? (ACELA1553, ACELT1642) 📖 R LA T



- The author makes much use of colloquialisms and references to popular culture. Why does Lim do this? Find three examples of each in the novel. (ACELA1553, ACELA1568) 📖 R LA
- The author makes use of several parallels and coincidences to help drive the plot. (For example: Both Angel and Monica were dancers who looked alike, Joss and O'Loughlin were both bikies, Sophie and Jordan both 'see' Daughtry when they are young.) How are these parallels or coincidences important to the plot? (ACELA1553; ACELT1643) 📖 R LA LT
- What strategies does Lim use to allow Sophie and Eve to communicate? Give at least three examples. When does Sophie finally hear Eve? Does Eve's method of communicating with Sophie alter as the novel progresses? (ACELA1553) ⚙️ R LA
- Would *Afterlife* be as effective if it were written in the third person narrative rather than delivered through Sophie's first person narration? Rewrite a paragraph in the third person and read it to a classmate. Does it alter the effect of the writing? (ACELT1642, ACELY1740) R LT LY S

THEMES

The Mystical and Supernatural

- 'So what I think is Eve – uh, Monica – used you to get through to me. It's the only explanation. I mean, you're not one of us, are you? The people who "see" dead people. And the rest.' He sounded faintly disgusted.' (p.89) Why does Jordan dislike his ability to see dead people? (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT
- 'Then she suddenly pushed the same handful of images at me again. It was like I was seeing something that was streaming at the wrong speed. And you can't tell someone like Eve to *slow down* or *rewind* or *zoom out*. It just doesn't work like that.' (p.16) What do you think would be the challenges of dealing with Sophie's experiences with Eve? (ACELT1812) ⚙️ R LT
- Is it possible that some people are born with supernatural powers such as Jordan's mother or Daughtry? Argue a case for one perspective. (ACELT1812) ⚙️ R LT
- Reread page 64. Why do you think the media thrive on stories about psychics, aliens and the supernatural? Do the rumours about Sophie spread at school for the same reasons? (ACELT1635) ⚙️ R LT

Bullying and Intimidation

- Reread the scene where Claudia Perretti and her gang physically attack Sophie. (p.101-3) What is their rationale for such use of violence? Can Claudia's bullying be compared to that of characters such as Roman and O'Loughlin? (ACELA1564) ⚙️ R LT LA
- 'I could hear Linda Jelly unloading on live TV about the endemic bully culture at Ivy Street High.' (p.63) What does the author suggest about Ivy Street High

School's attitude towards student bullying? Is there a message being conveyed through the depiction of Mrs McKendry? (ACELA1564) ⚙️ R LT LA

- Consider whether the media intrusion into Sophie's life could be considered a form of bullying or harassment. (ACELT1641) ⚙️ 👤 R LT
- Why do you think bullies operate in gangs? (For example: Claudia's 'Gang of Three' and O'Loughlin and the Reavers.) (ACELT1635) ⚙️ R LT
- Is the bullying and intimidation of others simply a desire for power and control? Does the novel suggest any other reasons? (ACELY1754) ⚙️ 👤 R LY

Life and death

- Sophie's insights into Eve's life create questions about what makes life worth living. Would Eve consider that her existence had been worthwhile? (ACELT1812) 👤 R LT
- Reread page 205. Why does the T-shirt play a key role in allowing Carter to accept Monica's death? (ACELT1812) ⚙️ R LT
- Why does Daughtry beg Jordan to keep Sophie alive? What temptation does death hold for Sophie? (ACELT1812) ⚙️ R LT
- What does the novel suggest about the mysteries of death through the references to the role of 'mastins' such as Daughtry? (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT
- 'But they were optimists. It used to disgust me how much they looked on the bright side of life because before I came along, they said, life had never been bright. It had been hopeless. But I'd saved them. That was the word Mum had used: *Saved*.' (p.2) Does Sophie's view about life as either bright or hopeless alter as a result of her experiences? (ACELT1774) ⚙️ R LT

Good and Evil

- 'You're as bad as your father,' she'd say. 'Both of you, *marshmallows*. But' – and her eyes would get this suspicious shine whenever she told me this – 'any creature comes to you for help, you bloody *help* them because I was that creature, once...'. (p.19) How do her mother's words assist your understanding of Sophie? (ACELT1641) 📖 R LT
- Why does Sophie's second heroic act of saving the man from being run over divide public opinion?
- Carter tells Sophie: 'You weren't far wrong when you said she seemed a bit evil.' (p.202) Does anyone perceive Eve as 'good' in any way? (ACELY1744) ⚙️ R LY
- Are any clues given about why characters such as O'Loughlin and his gang are so evil? (ACELY1744) ⚙️ R LY

RESPONSES

- Sophie possesses her own memories as well as experiencing some of Eve's. What is a painful or



fearful memory you can recall? What is a happy occasion you can remember? Write down your earliest memory. Write a reflection on memory that draws on the novel and your own experience.

(ACELT1644) ⚙️ R W LT

2. *Afterlight* provides the reader with an ambiguous rather than a clear ending. What do you think happens next? Use the events from the story, along with your own assumptions, to write an extension of the novel. (ACELT1644) ⚙️ R W LT
3. How far is too far? Where should we draw the line with media intrusion into peoples' private lives? Write a persuasive essay that argues your point of view on this topic. (ACELT1812) ⚖️ R W LT
4. Rebecca Lim raises some key questions in the Author's note: 'Why do bad things happen to good people? What happens to human energy, human consciousness, after death? Are we ruled by fate or by our own free will? Are we alone in the universe? How does one bad past act reverberate into the future?' Write a response to one of these questions or hold a class debate to come up with answers. (ACELT1812) ⚖️ R W LT
5. Imagine you are the principal of Ivy Street High School and an enquiry is being held into reports of an endemic culture of bullying at the school. Put forward your defence. (ACELT1812) ⚖️ R W LT
6. *Afterlight* suggests that those who are kind and moral do not always gain the upper hand over evil, violent and immoral people. Do you agree with this statement after reading the novel? (ACELT1812) ⚙️ R LT
7. 'I'd been everywhere – on TV, on talkback radio, all positive about *the youth of today*, for a change. They were calling me *inspirational and enigmatic, heaven sent.*' (p.32) Write a persuasive essay arguing that the youth of today are inspirational. (ACELT1812) ⚖️ R W LT
8. 'Eve was the message. She had to be.' (p.18) What messages about life – and death – do you take from your reading of *Afterlight*? (ACELT1635) ⚙️ R LT
9. 'I was so stiff, so cold, that only fear kept me going.' (p.213) *Afterlight* suggests that fear can propel people forward as well as hold them back. Do you agree? Write a response that discusses how fear is explored in the novel. (ACELT1815) R W LT
10. Write a creative response in which you tell the story of the old lady whom Sophie rescues at *Hatherlea*. Use a first person voice and draw on the detail of the novel. (ACELT1815) R LT W
11. Rewrite the bullying incident in the school toilets from Linda Jelly's point of view. (ACELY1746) ⚙️ R W LY
12. Sophie can be seen as heroic a number of times in the novel. Consider each of these incidents and argue your case for which was the most significant. (ACELY1746) ⚖️ ⚙️ R W LY
13. The ethics of the media are explored in the novel through the journalists who gather around The Star Hotel, the school and the current affairs TV show, 'Today Tonight'. Write a response arguing whether or not this type of journalism is essential in our society. (ACELY1746) ⚖️ ⚙️ R W LY