

FLAMES

ROBBIE ARNOTT

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Fiction, B paperback

VCE English and English as an Additional Language Text List (EAL), VCE English, Units 3 & 4 or Unit 1: List 1, Novels



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TEXT VCE ENGLISH TEACHING NOTES

- ▶ designed to meet the criteria of the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's *VCE English Study Design*
- ▶ scaffolded to help teachers and students gradually develop their knowledge and understanding of the set text
- ▶ cater to a range of student abilities and learning styles
- ▶ contain a variety of activities to enable individual and group work
- ▶ encourage oral and written responses to the text
- ▶ guide students to develop critical and supported responses to the text
- ▶ feature ICT-related tasks
- ▶ include suggested assessment tasks as well as supplementary resources



ASSESSMENT ADVICE

Flames could be used to assess the following outcomes:

Unit 3 English/EAL and end-of-year examination

Area of Study 1

Reading and creating texts:

- Outcome 1a Produce an analytical response to *Flames* (oral/multimodal or written)

OR

- Outcome 1b Produce a creative response to *Flames* (oral/multimodal or written)

Unit 1 English/EAL

Area of Study 1

Reading and creating texts:

- Outcome 1a Produce an analytical response to *Flames* (oral/multimodal or written).

OR

- Outcome 1b Produce a creative response to *Flames* (oral/multimodal or written).

Please note: Schools must use different texts to assess the analytical and creative responses and can only assess one task in oral or multimodal form. For further information, please consult the English/EAL Study Design on the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's website:

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/studies/english/index.aspx>



Credit: Mitch Osborne

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robbie Arnott was a 2019 *Sydney Morning Herald* Best Young Novelist and won the Margaret Scott Prize in the 2019 Tasmanian Premier's Literary Prizes. His widely acclaimed debut, *Flames* (2018), was shortlisted for a Victorian Premier's Literary Award, a New South Wales Premier's Literary Award, a Queensland Literary Award, the Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction and Not the Booker Prize. The follow-up, *The Rain Heron* (2020), won the Age Book of the Year Award, and was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award and the ALS Gold Medal. His third novel, *Limberlost*, is being published in 2022. He lives in Hobart.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

- Winner, Margaret Scott Prize, Tasmanian Premier's Literary Awards, 2019
- Shortlisted, Guardian's Not the Booker Prize, United Kingdom, 2019
- Shortlisted, Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Fiction, 2019
- Shortlisted, MUD Literary Club, Adelaide Writers' Week, 2019
- Shortlisted, UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing, NSW Premier's Literary Awards, 2019
- Shortlisted, Queensland Literary Awards: University of Queensland Fiction Book Award, 2018
- Shortlisted, Kathleen Mitchell Award, 2019
- Shortlisted, Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction, 2018
- Shortlisted, Tasmania Book Prize, Premier's Literary Awards, 2019



PRAISE FOR FLAMES

'A strange and joyous marvel.'

Richard Flanagan

'Ambitious storytelling from a stunning new Australian voice. *Flames* is constantly surprising—I never knew where the story would take me next. This book has a lovely sense of wonder for the world. It's brimming with heart and compassion.'

Rohan Wilson

'Robbie Arnott is a vivid and bold new voice in Australian fiction.'

Danielle Wood

'Visionary, vivid, full of audacious transformations: there's a marvellous energy to this writing that returns the world to us aflame. A brilliant and wholly original debut.'

Gail Jones

'Arnott skilfully switches between different voices and genres in a trick reminiscent of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. The range he displays is impressive, swinging from fable to gothic horror to hardboiled detective story.'

Books+Publishing

'*Flames* is an exuberantly creative and confident debut. This is a story that sparks with invention...Invigorating, strange and occasionally brutal.'

Australian Book Review

'This is the kind of book that you'll be able to read a second, third, even fourth time, and it will still never reveal all its secrets. Composed with meticulous attention to detail, and a mastery of form rarely found in a debut novel, *Flames* will keep you stewing long after you've finished reading it.'

Readings

'A surprising story with a definite feminist edge...the novel's playfulness and poetry make for a fresh and entertaining read.'

Saturday Paper

'Arnott confidently borrows from the genres of crime fiction, thriller, romance, comedy, eco-literature, and magical realism, throws them in the air, and lets the pieces land to form a flaming new world.'

Sydney Morning Herald

'This is a startlingly good first novel, stylistically adventurous, gorgeous in its descriptions and with a compelling narrative that should find a wide readership.'

Australian

'A gloriously audacious book. It runs astonishing risks and takes on the biggest emotions...It bowled me sideways.'

New Zealand Herald

'Unique and memorable...Extraordinary energy...A rich and memorable picture with prose of an exceptionally high quality. You won't read another Australian literary novel like this anytime soon.'

Kill Your Darlings

'[A] novel you will want to read more than once, not so much to plumb its depths as to savour its wild variety of styles and voices, to revel in its breathtaking descriptions of Tasmanian wilderness and to grasp its intricate structure...There is no doubt that a poetically wild and wicked imagination is at work here. More please!'

SA Weekend

'It's not hard to see where the hype came from. This is an assured, funny and highly imaginative work. *Flames* is strange from the first, arresting sentence.'

Stuff NZ

'Highly innovative...[A] finely built and realised first novel.'

Otago Daily Times

'*Flames* is brilliant...Enjoy it for its prose poetry, its vivid imagery, its brilliant turns of phrase on nearly every page.'

NZ Listener

'Delightful. He jumps playfully between different writing styles in every chapter...[An] enchanting story that also captures something very real about Tasmanian life.'

Guardian

'An engrossing narrative of mystery and escape that treats the reader to bravura runs of writing, especially around the elements of water and fire...You never quite know which direction the story will take off in as it creates a new kind of fairytale for our fire-prone landscape.'

Judges' report, Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Australian Novelist 2019



CHARACTERS

Edith McAllister—mother of Levi and Charlotte, estranged wife of Jack, the ‘third of the McAllister women [who] returned to the family after they’d been cremated’ as part of the environment before returning to the ‘landscape that had respawned them’

Jack McAllister—father of Levi and Charlotte, an ancient spirit born of fire who can take human form, estranged from his family

Levi McAllister—son, commissions Hough to craft a coffin for Charlotte

Charlotte McAllister—daughter, flees Levi when she discovers he is planning her coffin, meets Nicole at Melaleuca Farm Estate, emits flames when angry

Karl—father, fisherman, sells his catch to Oshikawa, unites Levi with his seal pup

Louise—married to Karl, mother to Charlotte and her sister

Nicola—daughter of Karl and Louise, colleague then girlfriend of Charlotte

Sister—Nicola’s sister

Seal—hunts with Karl, killed by orcas

Oshikawa—fish trader and wholesaler, owns the hut that Nicola and Charlotte stay in

Detective—searches for Charlotte, loves gin, was married to Graham Malik

Graham Malik—police detective, in the middle of a messy divorce from Patricia

Thurston Hough—author of *The Wooden Jacket*, hired by Levi to craft Charlotte’s coffin, killed by water rats avenging the Esk God’s death

Esk God—takes the form of a river rat, killed for his pelt by Hough

Cloud God—mourns the death of the Esk God; her grief causes untold flooding

Derek Quorn—founder of the Melaleuca Farm Estate, deceased

Mrs Quorn—owner of the Melaleuca Farm Estate

Allen Gibson—manager of the Melaleuca Farm Estate, goes mad killing wombats and eventually becomes a cormorant



CHAPTER SUMMARIES

| Chapter title | Perspective | Key events |
|---------------|---|--|
| Ash | Levi McAllister | Levi and Charlotte's mother (Edith) returns from the dead as a 'fern', 'two days' after they 'spread her ashes over Notley Fern Gorge'. Levi decides to '[look] for a coffin' for Charlotte to 'bury her whole and still and cold' in response to Charlotte's distress at her mother's second death in 'flames' 'four days' after her return. |
| Salt | Third person from Karl's perspective | Karl and his seal successfully hunt 'Oneblood' tuna until the seal is killed by orcas. Karl encounters Levi on the beach. Levi tells Karl he is making a 'coffin' for his 'twenty-three-year old' sister who is not 'sick'. |
| Sky | Third person from Charlotte's perspective | Charlotte flees Levi and the family home by bus when she realises Levi is building a coffin for her. She wakes to find a water rat asleep on her stomach. Charlotte seduces a miner in a bar but then flees when she realises he wants to have a threesome with her and his friend, another miner. She decides to head for Melaleuca. |
| Iron | Third person from the Esk God's perspective | The Esk God, a 'rakali...an oversized native water rat', swims upriver to reach 'the source of his world...the Cloud God'. He possesses a 'golden underbelly'. He is caught in an iron trap and killed for his pelt. |
| Fur | Levi and Thurston Hough | Levi and Thurston Hough exchange letters. Levi commissions a reluctant Hough to build an expensive coffin for Charlotte. Hough's manner is insulting. Having begun making the coffin, Hough 'renege[s]' on his 'deal' with Levi because he is being attacked by water rats. Hough asks Levi to collect 'the half-made coffin' but insists on keeping the 'glorious water rat pelt'. |
| Ice | Detective | Frustrated with the 'efforts' of the police, Levi hires a detective with an alcohol problem to find Charlotte. Her ex-husband Graham Malik provides her with the 'McAllister file'. She tracks down the two miners who tried to have a threesome with Charlotte. One of the miners reveals that Charlotte burnt his wrist even though 'she didn't have a lighter'. The miners tell the detective that Charlotte was interested in Melaleuca. The detective lures the miners into an intimate encounter and then punishes them physically for the offensive language they used to describe Charlotte. Graham Malik discovers that Charlotte's father has a 'forged identity'. A former client, Cindy, takes the detective by plane to try and find Charlotte. They encounter 'burnt heathland' and the detective meets and is 'bewitched' by Charlotte's father who warns her to 'stay away from [his] daughter'. |
| Feather | Allen Gibson | Allen's diary entries. Allen recalls the strange events at the farm. Wombats are being killed 'through some kind of unnatural molestation' by 'some kind of bird', later revealed to be a 'monstrous cormorant'. Farmhands Nicola and Charlotte find the deaths 'distressing'. More cormorants arrive at the farm, leaving black feathers all over the farm. Charlotte and Nicola contact the ranger 'without [Allen's] permission'. Allen's mood darkens. The ranger asks Allen if he is 'feeling unwell'. Allen is attacked by the cormorant. Allen kills a wombat and then realises he has been killing the wombats in his 'sleep'. Allen realises that the cormorant has 'joined with [him]' and is inside him. Nicola witnesses Allen killing a wombat. Allen tries to kill Nicola. Charlotte emits fire and burns Allen before he escapes into an 'old tin mine' before turning into a cormorant. |



| Chapter title | Perspective | Key events |
|---------------|---|---|
| Cake | Mavis Midcurrent | Chapter 28 of <i>Cream, Butter and Small-Town Nutters: The Life and Times of an Avoca Matriarch</i> . In this chapter, Mavis reveals that Hough's unrecognisable body was found at his home having been 'gnawed' by 'water rats'. Hough's body was discovered by a young man, who reported the discovery to police and then left with 'the half-finished coffin Mr Hough had been building for him' and the 'golden-brown pelt'. |
| Grass | Third person from ranger's perspective | The ranger tells of his visit to the farm estate and the flames he witnessed coming from Charlotte. Charlotte and Nicola disappear. The ranger decides not to tell anybody about what he saw. |
| Snow | Third person from Nicola's perspective | Nicola tells of her desire for Charlotte and her ability to stop Charlotte's fires. Nicola and Charlotte flee to Oshikawa's 'hut' in Crater Lake just out of Cradle Mountain, a familiar place to both from childhood. Nicole's 'plan' is to 'bring Charlotte somewhere fireproof'. Nicole extinguishes Charlotte's fires as she sleeps. Nicola and Charlotte kiss, and the detective tracks them down. |
| Wood | Third person from Levi McAllister's perspective | Levi discovers Hough's body. He takes the pelt from Hough's hands. He reflects on his reasons for wanting to build the coffin for Charlotte and decides to finish the coffin himself. Levi's father visits and they argue about his father's absence. Levi asks him to leave. |
| Coal | Third person from Jack McAllister's perspective | This is the story of Jack's birth as fire and his ability to 'transfer himself into any fire across the island' and take human form. He meets Edith McAllister and reveals himself to her in various guises. He throws 'a tiny spark into the crinkles of her brain' to 'burn out the ill-feeling she'd formed of him'. They marry and have two children. He passes fire to Charlotte via a tear drop when Charlotte is a baby. He confesses who he really is to Edith and this brings them closer. Edith asks him to leave when she realises he can erase thought and has done this to her before. Edith dies and he burns her as part of the cremation. Edith's death makes him feel he has no purpose anymore and he distances himself from Levi and Charlotte because 'he did not want to be close to them when they [died]'. |
| Grove | Charlotte McAllister | The detective, Nicola and Charlotte return to the McAllister home. Charlotte reflects on her love for her brother, her plans to leave Nicola and her distant relationship with her father. They track down Levi building Charlotte's coffin at Notley Fern Gorge. They fight over the pelt in his hand and Nicola is injured. Charlotte bursts into flames. Nicola extinguishes her with her body and is badly burned. Charlotte's father 'step[s] out' of the flames. Heavy rain falls. |
| Cloud | Third person from the Cloud God's perspective | The Cloud God grieves the loss of her love, the Esk God, who has taken the form of a river rat with a 'golden-brown pelt'. She 'rage[s]' as a 'storm'. A cormorant emerges from a tin mine. |
| Sea | Levi McAllister | Levi and Charlotte reconcile. Karl takes Levi into the ocean to meet a seal pup. |



CLASSROOM AND HOMEWORK ACTIVITIES

READING JOURNAL

At the start or end of each class, ask students to write for five minutes, recording brief responses to *Flames*. Ask them to reflect on their earlier responses in relation to their later responses. What do they notice about their different responses? What do they think has influenced similar, deepened or different conclusions?

DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

Use the Visible Thinking routine: 'Think, Feel, Care' (Harvard Visible Thinking Routine) to develop students' understanding of the different viewpoints Arnott tries to convey in his text.

http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Think%20Feel%20Care_1.pdf

For example:

- Charlotte's view of her father
- Levi's view of his sister
- Jack McAllister's view of his wife

THE WORLD OF THE TEXT

1. Investigate the following places which constitute the natural world of the text. Summarise your findings into three dot points and include an image or symbol to support your understanding, as well as a quote from the text.
 - Melaleuca in the south-west
 - Notley Fern Gorge in the Tamar Valley
 - Cradle Mountain National Park
 - Hawley on the north coast
2. The historical and cultural world of the text. Read 'Coal' from pages 166–71. Discuss how this passage acknowledges and pays respect to Tasmania's Aboriginal history and culture.
3. Briefly research the Launceston floods of 2016 and Dunalley bushfire of 2013. Explain their connection to *Flames*.
4. Strange and unusual things happen in the social world of the text. For example, some humans reincarnate as both humans and part of the natural world, humans live alongside gods (who take both human and animal form), some humans have supernatural powers, seals work alongside humans like cattle dogs, wombat pelts are harvested and a human turns into a cormorant.
 - Create a class collaborative document. In small groups, locate textual evidence to support discussion of the bizarre events that occur alongside the everyday.
 - Read Arnott's 'NOTE' at the end of the text. Investigate the following real people: Deny King, Marjorie Bligh and Taffy the Bee Man (Helmer Henry Hastings Huxley). List the characters you think they inspired.
 - Individually, write a paragraph discussing how Arnott creates a unique view of Tasmania and the impact this has on the reader. Do you think Arnott's creativity makes the text more engaging? Include textual evidence to support your discussion.
 - Arnott never identifies Tasmania as the text's setting. Why do you think he leaves this detail out?



EXAMINING CHARACTERISATION

Use the following table to develop notes on the following characters. Support each of your observations with an illustrative quote:

- Levi McAllister
- Charlotte McAllister
- Jack McAllister
- The detective

| | |
|--|--|
| Name of character (Does his/her actual name seem significant?) | |
| Appearance | |
| Does Arnott's description influence the reader to endorse or condemn this character? | |
| Personality | |
| Values (as revealed by behaviour/ actions, responses or dialogue) | |
| Views/attitudes (as revealed by behaviour/actions, responses or dialogue) | |
| Traits | |



| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Interests</p> | |
| <p>Outlook i.e. worldview (How would the character describe the world they live in? What words would you use to describe their worldview/outlook on life?)</p> | |
| <p>Personal history – which events from the past seem to have influenced the development of this character?</p> | |
| <p>Who is this character in relationship with/connected to? What is the nature of this relationship?</p> | |
| <p>Are any of these close relationships?</p> | |
| <p>How would you describe the quality of the relationship this character has with other (specific) characters?</p> | |
| <p>Which of these relationships change?</p> | |
| <p>Which key moments influence this change? (Turning points)</p> | |
| <p>Do any of his/her values change over the course of the narrative?</p> | |



| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Which settings (places) do you associate with the character? How does the character feel in this setting?</p> | |
| <p>What might this setting symbolise about the character?</p> | |
| <p>Do any of his/her views change over the course of the narrative?</p> | |
| <p>Think about the fate of this character. Do you think the character is rewarded or punished in some way for the values he/she possesses?</p> | |
| <p>Which values seem to be important to Arnott?</p> | |



STRUCTURE, LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Questions for discussion and review

1. What is special about the quote in the epigraph, as well as its context? What role does it play in establishing the novel's chief concerns?
2. Consider the chapter titles. Do these titles seem significant? How do the titles help the reader inhabit the world of the text?
3. *Flames* begins and ends from Levi's point of view. Why do you think Arnott concludes with Levi's story? Which values are endorsed and condemned in the opening and closing chapters? Provide examples from the text to support your discussion.
4. *Flames* is told in a variety of voices and genres. As a class, list what you already know about the following genres—imaginative, family drama, mythic, gothic horror, road novel and crime (particularly noir).
5. Create a collaborative document and allocate the following genres and chapters to specific small groups. Each group needs to contribute the following information to the shared document: the characteristics of the genre and examples of this at work in the chapter/s. Chapters for review: 'Feather'—gothic horror, 'Salt'—imaginative, 'Ice'—crime/noir, 'Cloud' & 'Iron'—mythic and 'Sea'—family drama.
6. Which chapters contain elements of the road novel genre? How does what happens on the road parallel the growth in a particular character or characters' relationships?
7. *Flames* is fragmented in style, with multiple plots that eventually come together. Consider which characters (and relationships) are restored, renewed or begun because of their connection to others by the novel's end. Write a paragraph which explores how the novel's conclusion suggests that broken humans can be restored by love, forgiveness and nature.
8. Read the opening chapter, 'Ash', noting what is revealed about the McAllister women, the mood established by this passage, any words or sentences that seem important and any imagery conveyed. What ideas/concerns are established in these opening pages? Support your observations with specific evidence.
9. Arnott captures aspects of the Australian vernacular in all its glory, particular through the detective, Graham Malik and his cop-speak (p.87) and Mavis Midcurrent's droll humour (p.121). Using the pages listed, identify specific examples.
10. Thurston Hough is a particularly obnoxious character who meets an untimely death. Compare and contrast his language with Levi's during their exchange of letters in 'Fur'. How does Arnott use language to condemn Hough? Explore the way Hough's tone shifts too. How does this create suspense?

'ROBBIE ARNOTT ON FLAMES' DISCUSSION AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

Watch the video below and then complete the following discussion and writing activities:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPEdGitxhLg>

1. Having viewed 'Robbie Arnott on *Flames*', write three paragraphs exploring ONE of the following ideas. Support your analysis with evidence from the text and the interview.
 - love
 - grief
 - family
 - hope
 - relationships
 - the natural world
2. Watch 'Robbie Arnott on *Flames*' for a second time, this time taking Cornell Notes on the following topics in the right-hand side of your notes:
 - issues raised by the text
 - the strange and unusual in *Flames*
 - characters and perspectives
 - the setting and environment
 - the novel's different formats and techniques
 - Arnott's intentions
 - anything else you think is important
3. When you have finished, list questions your notes might answer in the left-hand side of your notes.
4. Extension. Write a paragraph in response to one of the following tasks:
 - explain Arnott's reluctance to identify the place as Tasmania and use the term 'magical realism'.
 - explain the motivation behind Arnott's decision to include different entities like fire in human form and a river god in the form of a water rat.



THEMES, IDEAS AND VALUES

Connection and renewal

The novel explores the power and importance of respectful connection via an array of unusual and complicated relationships. Levi's sincere yet obsessive and misunderstood desire to protect his sister from her fate fractures their relationship, and Jack's desire to make Elinor love him ultimately leads to his estrangement from his family once she discovers the depth of his duplicity and betrayal. Karl struggles to recover after the brutal death of his seal, and Thurston Hough's scorn for the human and natural world invites fatal judgement from the animal kingdom. The miners' failure to seek consent for a threesome with Charlotte destroys the intimacy of the moment with the miner whom she had initiated an encounter with. Despite the demise of their marriage, the detective and Graham Malik have developed a professionally supportive relationship, unlike Malik's relationship with Patricia, which has become toxic. Even though Charlotte has misgivings about her relationship with Nicola, she finds that she cannot be without her.

Tasks

1. Compile a table which provides an overview of the distressing losses Charlotte, Levi, Jack and Karl experience in *Flames*. Include examples of the different ways each individual grieves in response. Do characters respond via action, by listening or through dialogue? What impact does their grief have on those around them?
2. Write a paragraph exploring the way the McAllister and Karl's family (as a system) responds to these experiences. Include textual evidence to support your discussion.
3. Charlotte is depicted by Arnott as a strong, empowered woman who initiates a sexual encounter with a miner at a bar but withdraws her consent once a second miner attempts to join them without any discussion. Read pages 32–34. Compare this scene with Charlotte's first moment of intimacy with Nicola on pages 153–54. Identify quotes which depict Charlotte as an assertive, confident woman who is clear about the type of human connection she values. Practise writing about this idea by writing a sentence that integrates the quotations (or part thereof) as evidence.
4. The detective and Malik's relationship endures (even though the detective describes herself as Graham's 'ex-wife'), whereas Elinor and Jack's relationship disintegrates completely when Elinor realises what she has with Jack is built on deception. Compare and contrast the different ways each couple responds to betrayal. Why is the detective able to continue her relationship with Malik, whereas Elinor feels her relationship with Jack is irreconcilable?
5. Even though Charlotte says 'Levi and I have never understood each other', she acknowledges 'that between us there is love' (p.192). Create a

timeline which tracks the turning points in their relationship from the initial fracture to their eventual reconciliation.

Flames and floods

In *Flames* we encounter people resurrecting from the ashes of cremation, the fire of passion and anger, fire taking human form, the destructive and regenerative power of fire, fire's role in human ritual and the might of storms and flood.

1. Using the ideas listed above, create a table which documents Arnott's use of fire as a recurring motif in the narrative. Include quotes to support discussion.
2. In 'Cloud' we are told 'the hardest storms are made of sorrow'. Investigate the key features of flood myths, including their message of destruction and renewal in creation, as well as people being punished by a god to redirect them to the right path. Who is avenged in 'Cloud'? Consider the sequencing of 'Cloud' and 'Sea'. How is humankind's relationship with nature restored in 'Sea'?



ASSESSMENT: ANALYTICAL AND CREATIVE TEXT RESPONSE TOPICS

CREATIVE TEXT RESPONSE

Flames lends itself beautifully to the creative text response task. Students could explore many silences in the text or add to the text/explore gaps in the novel. Students also have a wonderful opportunity to write in a variety of forms.

Some suggestions appear below.

Exploring a silence

There are many characters who are largely hidden figures in the text. What perspectives could they bring to key events in the novel?

Here are some suggestions:

- Edith's return from the dead having spontaneously combusted from her perspective.
- Consider the events of 'Salt' from Louise's perspective.
- Edith feels betrayed by Jack and asks him to leave. Explain Edith's decision from her point of view (pp.187–88).
- Nicola's sister 'looks at the ground' (p.221) when Levi tries to apologise to her family. What were her experiences of the storm? Why is she looking at the ground? What does she think about Nicola's idea (p.222)?

Filling a gap/adding to the text

There are many gaps in the story that could be filled, as well as backstories/epilogues that could be added to the text.

Here are some suggestions:

- The detective had an entirely different life until her fiancé cheated on her. Was the fiancé Graham Malik or someone else? What happened? (pp.83–84)
- The detective saved Cindy from a violent relationship. Explore events from Cindy's point of view (pp.89–90).
- *Flames* ends hopefully with the line, 'It has kept me afloat ever since.' Explore the relationship Levi has with his seal pup. How has it 'kept [him] afloat'?

ANALYTICAL TEXT RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Flames can also be assessed as an analytical text response and Unit 3 and 4 students have the option of writing on *Flames* in their final examination.

Suggested topics

- 'But I know between us there is love.' Is this the main message of *Flames*? Discuss.
- 'And she took with her the most human parts of him.' *Flames* shows that grief affects people in different ways. Discuss.
- 'Normally I keep my sentences short, if I say anything at all...' *Flames* is more about silence than it is about communication. Discuss.
- 'I wipe water from my eyes: my father has disappeared.' In *Flames* distance is a means of survival. Discuss.
- How does the use of multiple perspectives influence the reader's response to *Flames*?
- 'It has kept me afloat ever since.' *Flames* is a novel about the power of connection. Discuss.
- How do the minor characters in *Flames* shape our understanding of the themes and other characters?
- 'How much rage and angst and sorrow was contained in those sheets of winter water!' *Flames* celebrates nature's potency. Discuss.
- Despite the strangeness and humour of *Flames*, it addresses some serious issues. Discuss.
- 'I have nothing to forgive. I have only trust to win back.' In *Flames*, trust is rare. To what extent do you agree?







SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

REVIEWS

- [Culturefly](#)
- [Guardian: Not the Booker Prize](#)
- [Kill Your Darlings](#)
- [Otago Daily Times](#)
- [Readings](#)
- [Stuff NZ](#)
- [Sydney Morning Herald](#)

INTERVIEWS

-  [Hub podcast](#)
-  [The Readings podcast](#), A conversation with Robbie Arnott
-  [ABC Hobart](#), Your Afternoon
-  [2SER's Tuesday Book Club](#)
- [Examiner](#)
- [Kill Your Darlings](#)

EXTENSION READING LIST

Writers who influenced Arnott's writing in *Flames*:

Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Richard Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish*

Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*

H. P. Lovecraft

David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

Ryan O'Neill, *The Weight of the Human Heart*

Haruki Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Jill Fitzsimons is the Director of Professional Learning and Pedagogy at Marcellin College and is a VCE English teacher. She has worked as a VCE English and GAT assessor and has presented workshops for VCE English teachers. Jill has also appeared on ABC Melbourne's 'Sunday School' program for VCE students and has written a variety of study guides for VCE English and Literature.