



scot gardner

One Dead Seagull – Teacher's Notes by Scot Gardner

One Dead Seagull is a book about life. About making it, even when the odds are shit. About finding love in the strangest places. About mates and fear and being wild.

The notes draw on a few of the major themes in the book.

1. Accident, Injury, Disability, Self image
2. Families, Separation, Discipline
3. Independence, Self-responsibility, Taking control of your life
4. Addiction, Smokes, Alcohol, Drugs
5. Mates, Enemies, Anger, Violence
6. Nature, Environment, Camping
7. Clothes, Nudity, Sexuality, First love

For each of the themes, there are some questions About the Book, a Snippet of my thoughts and some What Do You Think? ideas for discussion.

The **What Do You Think?** exercises are designed to engage young people in an individual and creative way. They provide opportunities for students to tell stories from their own lives and develop a personal voice through writing and discussions. A couple of suggestions are: set some ground rules prior to discussions (respect others' stories, 'I' statements, positive feedback) and get actively involved in discussions (teacher tells their own stories as part of the process)

Ten Fast Minutes is a creative writing activity. For exactly ten minutes, disregard language, grammar, spelling, character, plot and structure and tell a story. The telling of the story is paramount. Students should be coached to keep their hand moving for the whole ten minutes.

The results may be 'stream of consciousness' or have more or less structure. Some people might like to read theirs aloud. Some might be refined further.

Show, Don't Tell is a fiction writer's axiom. It's the crux of professional writing. Instead of writing, 'Bob was angry' and feeding the reader all the information, say 'Bob's face changed colour, from red to purple' still conveying the image but drawing the reader into the story. Some of the exercises use this technique to expand young people's grasp of creative writing.

The **For the Courageous** questions are curly ones. Teachers will know their groups well enough to decide if opening discussions on these issues will be courageous or stupid. I like to err on the side of madness in the classroom, but I wouldn't ask you to.

THEME 1.

ACCIDENT, INJURY, DISABILITY, SELF-IMAGE

Wayne is a bit accident-prone. He cuts his hand off (p47), accidentally gets into a punch-up (p93), falls off a cliff (p123), and leaves his wallet in a truck (p 139, 142).

Wayne is hospitalised after cutting himself on the brick saw. He flat-lines. He becomes an amputee. (pp48-52)

After his accident, he believes that Mandy is out of his league (p52).

FROM THE BOOK

1. Is there any way Wayne's accident with the brick saw could have been prevented?
2. Why did Wayne and Den fall over the cliff?
3. Wayne loses a hand. Who is the other disabled character in the book?

SNIPPET

My mate Dr Darra says 'everybody has a pathology' meaning everyone is restricted in some way by their mind or their body. For some it happens at birth, for others it is acquired. Maybe you're frightened of the dark, maybe you can't run. Maybe your breath stinks. Maybe your legs don't work. Life is about learning to live with what we've got.

I'm allergic to things like pop music (nothing new to say and no new ways to say it) and fast food (I'd rather go hungry) and American sitcoms (vicarious living).

When I was two I spilled some caustic solution on my face and my eyes went totally white. I was blind for three weeks. I can still remember the texture of bandages on my eyes.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Discuss some of the accidents you've had or missed. Keep it personal.

Do you have disabled people in your life? How is life different for them?

Is a missing finger a disability? What is a disability?

Show, don't tell. (Ten fast minutes.) Death? The closest I've ever been is when ...

FOR THE COURAGEOUS

What's the worst way to die?

THEME 2.

FAMILIES, SEPARATION, DISCIPLINE

Wayne lives with his mum (p1). His dad lives in a caravan in the next suburb (pp21-22).

Dennis has a strong family (pp10-11).

Wayne is an only child (p1).

Mick, Wayne's dad, slaps him across the face (p56).

Sylvie, Wayne's mum, is stormy and yells at Wayne (p75, 146).

Wayne is unsettled by the idea of his parents getting back together (pp111-112, 132, 155).

FROM THE BOOK

1. Why might Wayne be upset about the idea of his parents getting back together?
2. What was Wayne's dad's father like? (Wayne's paternal grandfather) How did he affect Mick's parenting?
3. Why did Mick slap Wayne across the face?

SNIPPET

One of my daughters, Belle, went to a primary school in Morwell a few years ago. In her class of 27, only one child lived with both biological parents. It wasn't Belle.

My mum and dad are still married and still in love. They've got a mutual habit in line dancing. Kind of embarrassing to admit that ...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Survey the class. Have them describe their family.

Have you ever been *naughty*? Were you punished? How were you punished when you were little? (Privileges taken away, smacked, sent to your room, time out.) How is that different to today?

FOR THE COURAGEOUS

Why do people separate?

(Ten fast minutes.) If I ever have kids, I'm not gunna...

Show, don't tell. (Ten fast minutes.) What does a good family do? A good family ...

THEME 3.

INDEPENDENCE, SELF-RESPONSIBILITY, TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE

Wayne thinks his mum harasses him too much (p1).

Wayne cleans his room up in an effort to suck up to his mum (p27).

Wayne chooses to get on with life after his injury, with a bit of encouragement from Den (p61), his family and friends (pp67-73).

Wayne doesn't want to be like his dad (p13) or the people he meets in the truck stop (pp136-137).

Wayne does a runner to Brisbane from Melbourne (p137).

FROM THE BOOK

1. What sorts of things does Wayne's mum harass him about at the flat?
2. What sort of things does Wayne do that shows he's responsible?

3. What sorts of irresponsible things does Wayne do?

4. Wayne makes a very conscious decision in the park behind the Roma Street station. What does he decide?

SNIPPET

Living independently as a part of a community takes courage. Creeping towards adulthood, we lust for independence more and more: a life of our own, a job, a car. Taking control of your life usually happens gradually. Learn to crawl, stand and walk. Later we learn to brush our teeth, pick up towels, and buy condoms. Sometimes taking responsibility is dead boring. It's the essence of manhood and womanhood.

I got bored with classroom schooling in year eleven. I got a gardening apprenticeship with the local council. I shifted from home when I was nineteen. My dad told me to 'keep my head down' (work for love and money) and I'd always be learning. Growing. He was right.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

List five things you could do in each of the following places to show your independence and responsibility:

1. Home
2. School
3. Party

What sorts of things do you do now that your folks didn't let you do five years ago?

FOR THE COURAGEOUS

Show, don't tell. Dream, on paper, of what you might be doing in five years time. Describe the things you do without telling us exactly what you do. ('I dunno' is not an answer!)

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THEME 4.

ADDICTION, SMOKES, ALCOHOL, DRUGS

Wayne smokes and is pissed off about the way it effects his body (p2, 63, 87, 143, 145).

Wayne drinks and smokes dope at a party (pp30-31).

Wayne's mum and dad and mates smoke.

FROM THE BOOK

1. What does Wayne prefer to drink?
2. Whose bong do they use at Rebecca's party?
3. Who does Wayne make a promise to about quitting the smokes?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Drugs are a part of life. They all mess with your body and make you feel good. Getting hooked on anything will shorten your life if you take it to excess. Sex, money, work, coffee, TV, pizza. So what's excess?

Can you think of any habits that your parents have that you've picked up? (Patterns of speech, mannerisms, likes and dislikes.)

Is smoking hereditary?

What's legal at your age?

(Ten fast minutes.) I drink/smoke/eat chocolate because it makes me feel ...

FOR THE COURAGEOUS

How many people in the class smoke? Drink? More girls or boys?

THEME 5.

MATES, ENEMIES, ANGER, VIOLENCE

Wayne's best mate is Den (p3).

Griz and Den have a violent and seemingly incurable distaste for each other (p8, pp19-20, 133-134).

Wayne gets pounded at the beach for no apparent reason (p93).

Wayne's accident is violent (p47).

Den gets pounded by Otto and Picko (pp133-134).

Den calls his best mate a 'sister rooter' in anger (p121).

FROM THE BOOK

1. How long have Den and Wayne been mates?
2. Why did Griz get suspended?
3. Just prior to Christmas, Wayne's mum gets seriously angry with him. What about?

SNIPPET

My best mate Dave and I met when we were going to kinder. I got to be his best man. He took the photo of me in the book.

In Heartbreak High and Degrassi High there's not a lot of maths action. There aren't many English lessons to endure. It's all about socialising. The kids who get bored with school work usually rate 'seeing their mates' as their main reason for being at school.

Anger is good. It's a healthy emotion like sadness and fear and joy. Being violent is an unhealthy way of expressing anger in the same way that pissing your pants is an unhealthy way of expressing joy!

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What makes a good mate? Is it different for boys and girls?

Can you have a girl for a mate if you're a boy?

(Ten fast minutes.) Yep, I hurt him/her. You want to know why?

FOR THE COURAGEOUS

What's worth fighting for?

THEME 6.

NATURE, ENVIRONMENT, CAMPING

The title is a metaphor for Wayne's feelings of helplessness after his accident (p132).

Much of the climactic action happens in Mars Cove National Park (pp83-130).

Wayne has Aboriginal heritage (p77, pp84-85).

Wayne is frightened of sharks and the dark (p85, 95, 100).

FROM THE BOOK

1. What is the significance of the title of the book?
2. There are several dead animals on the road to Mars Cove. Do they all have pouches?
3. What Australian native animal does Wayne eat in Bairnsdale?

SNIPPET

I love the bush, the desert, and the sea; big fat rivers, lyrebirds and hard rain. I love swimming in the nuddy and looking at the night sky from my swag. It makes me feel like anything is possible.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What sorts of things can you do when you go camping that you don't do at home? (Sleeping all together, reading by gaslight, walking for ages to get to the bathroom then share it with strangers.)

Do people change when they go camping? (Relax, stress, eat more, sleep more.)

Describe a camping experience you'd like to be involved in – what you'd bring, what you eat, how you'd get there, the things to look out for. If you don't like camping then bring all the comforts of home.

(Ten fast minutes.) I remember when we camped ... (in the lounge, under the bed, at Uluru, at Grandma's).

FOR THE COURAGEOUS

Show, don't tell. Go to a bush location, park or the back of the school and describe the environment without using your sense of sight.

THEME 7

CLOTHES, NUDITY, SEXUALITY, FIRST LOVE

Wayne is a sexual being.

The Hume family sees nudity as something natural (pp101-106).

Wayne is infatuated with Mandy and finds something completely different in Kerry (pp2-3, 111).

Wayne doesn't recognise Mandy's boyfriend out of uniform (p89).

There are many symbols of love and affection in the book. Wayne and Den stick up for each other, Wayne tells his mum that 'she's the best mum he's ever had', Wayne gives Kerry flowers.

FROM THE BOOK

1. What perfume does Mandy wear?
2. What clothes does Wayne wear swimming at Mars Cove?
3. What sculpture do Wayne, Den and Kerry make on the beach at Chestnut Bay?

This whole section can be a Pandora's Box in the classroom. It's such a fertile edge (pun intended) in many young peoples' minds. Some powerful personal writing is possible here.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What sorts of things are displayed through clothing? (Gender, status, mood.)

Explore nudity in relation to family/societal values. Is it okay to be naked around home? In front of your parents? In the change room at the sports club?

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Is nudity always sexual? (In the shower, baby or toddler on the beach.) Is it the same for women and men?

List five ways you could show love and respect for:

1. Mates
2. Family
3. Girlfriend/boyfriend

Show, don't tell. (Ten fast minutes.) Write a love scene where one person shows the other that they love them without using the word 'love'.

FOR THE COURAGEOUS

What's the difference between like and love?

What's the difference between love and sex?



SOME ANSWERS FOR THE 'FROM THE BOOK' QUESTIONS

THEME 1

ACCIDENT, INJURY, DISABILITY, SELF-IMAGE

1. Is there any way Wayne's accident with the brick saw could have been prevented?

Who knows? Maybe the water supply could have been checked, maybe Mick should have been cutting the bricks. Sometimes stuff like that just happens.

2. Why did Wayne and Den fall over the cliff?
At Kapunda Falls, Wayne and Den were not on good terms. Den had trouble dealing with Wayne's affection for his sister and Wayne had revved him up by pretending to push him off the edge. Den was paying Wayne back for the fright and it got out of hand.

3. Wayne loses a hand. Who is the other physically disabled character in the book?
Richo's dad. He lost his hand in a flourmill.

THEME 2.

FAMILIES, SEPARATION, DISCIPLINE

1. Why might Wayne be upset about the idea of his parents getting back together?

He's been on his own with his mum for a long time, the change alone would be threatening. He has heavy memories of what they were like when they were living together.

2. What was Wayne's dad's father like? (Wayne's paternal grandfather) How did he affect Mick's parenting?

He used to beat Mick and his mum would stand and watch. Mick resolved never to hit his own kid in anger.

3. Why did Wayne's dad slap him across the face?

Wayne had accused his dad of sleeping with Pat in preference to being with him in hospital.

THEME 3.

INDEPENDENCE, SELF-RESPONSIBILITY, TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE

1. What sorts of things does Wayne's mum harass him about at the flat?

Brushing his teeth and having clean jocks.

2. What sort of things does Wayne do that show he's responsible? What sorts of irresponsible things does Wayne do?

Responsible – works with his dad, cleans up his room, brings a message home from Richo, asks his neighbours for the flowers and giving them to Kez.

Irresponsible – stealing pornos from Hendo, stealing money from his mum, nicking off to Brisbane.

3. Wayne makes a very conscious decision in the park behind the Roma Street station. What does he decide?

He misses Kerry and his folks, and decides to go home.

THEME 4.

ADDICTION, SMOKES, ALCOHOL, DRUGS

1. What does Wayne prefer to drink?

He'll drink beer but he prefers bourbon.

2. Whose bong do they use at Rebecca's party?

Carlson's.

3. Who does Wayne make a promise to about quitting the smokes?

God.

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THEME 5.

MATES, ENEMIES, ANGER, VIOLENCE

1. How long have Den and Wayne been mates?

They went to kinder together, about ten years.

2. Why did Griz get suspended?

For lighting a smoke bomb in science and smoking the school out.

3. Just prior to Christmas, Wayne's mum gets seriously angry with him. What about?

Forgetting to tell her that he was going away with the Humes and not going up to Shepparton with her.

THEME 6.

NATURE, ENVIRONMENT, CAMPING

1. What is the significance of the title of the book?

One Dead Seagull refers to how Wayne feels after his accident.

2. There are several dead animals on the road to Mars Cove. Do they all have pouches?

Three wombats, a wallaby and a kangaroo. They all have pouches.

3. What Australian native animal does Wayne eat in Bairnsdale?

Kangaroo meat pie.

THEME 7.

CLOTHES, NUDITY, SEXUALITY, FIRST LOVE

1. What perfume does Mandy wear?

Vanilla.

2. What clothes does Wayne wear swimming at Mars Cove?

Hawks footy shorts and undies.

3. What sculpture do Wayne, Den and Kerry make on the beach at Chestnut Bay?

Half man, half woman in the sand. Den builds breasts, Kez builds a penis.

For comments and suggestions, please email Scot at scot_gardner@hotmail.com

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