



Blue Water High

the novel

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Teachers' Notes

These teachers' notes attempt to provide teachers with a variety of tasks and activities to suit the different ages and abilities of their students. The tasks and activities can be adapted by the teachers to suit the audience and purpose of their lessons, and provide opportunities for individual, group and class work. Teachers should also feel free to use these as a springboard for their own ideas, especially if they can make the experience of studying this novel more relevant to the students. Under the heading **TASKS AND ACTIVITIES** there are topic subheadings. These may cover themes dealt with in the text, language exercises, text comprehension and/or interpretation, and areas of general interest that require research outside the box of the text. These notes cover a large range of themes, tasks and activities, but they are by no means comprehensive. The text is rich with possibilities for the teacher and student to explore, extend and add to these notes. Students should be encouraged to make use of a variety of sources: the Internet; library; and their teachers and parents. By reading and studying the text through these teachers' notes, it is hoped that teachers can foster an appreciation of not just the value of reading a novel for enjoyment, but also using literature as a means for learning more about the world around us.

SYNOPSIS

In *Blue Water High* we wend our way through the awkwardness, turmoil, confusion, frustrations and joys of Fly Watson's first love, with life at a surfing academy for young hopefuls as the backdrop. Fly wins an Australia-wide competition for one of seven places at the Solar Blue Surf Academy, and narrates the story of how she and her friends spend a year at the Academy. The four girls and three boys learn all about surfing at the Surf Academy, while their academic training is taken care of at the local school, Blue Water High. Home is the Solar Blue Boarding House. Away from their own families, the grommets learn to be independent, while also taking on the responsibilities that are incumbent with sharing a large residence with "flatmates", such as cooking and cleaning and consideration for others. As the year progresses, their activities and experiences weave and knit together relationships which bind them into a close family, even though at times they have to compete with each other.

Simmo and Deb are the teachers at the Academy, while Jilly is the housemother at the Boarding House. Although loving and caring, they do not become surrogate parents. They are there to guide, mentor and teach the grommets all about surfing and life skills.

Rigorous physical training and learning all about the finer points of surfing, no matter what the conditions, together with learning how to be part of a team, or to compete against others, are the order of the day. Schoolwork is also given equal weighting with surfing. The prize at the end of the year is for one boy and one girl to win a sponsorship to travel the World Circuit for one year.

The book is filled with themes and graphic accounts that hold one's interest for the duration of the story. Throughout her year at the Solar Blue Academy Fly copes with falling in love with Heath, a fellow student at the Academy, and all the maelstrom of emotions this evokes; others there also pair off. Fly learns to take possession of her fears and how to overcome them. There are occasions where Fly's naivety and lack of maturity lead her, and sometimes others, into unfortunate or interesting scrapes, such as a midnight caravan ride, followed by an encounter with the police. There are problems with a massive phone bill, birthday celebrations that do not go quite according to plan, an encounter with a shark, surfing competitions and a surfboard decorating competition and coping with school work. Then we reach the climax, the announcement of the two sponsorship winners at a grand and formal reception, before the year at the Solar Blue Surf Academy comes to an end.





MAIN CHARACTERS

Fly Watson – the central character. This is her nickname; Fiona is her real name.

Other students at the Solar Blue Surf Academy:

Bec Sanderson
 Anna Petersen
 Perri Lawe
 Heath Carroll
 Dean Edgeley
 Matt Leyland

The Solar Blue Academy staff:

Simmo
 Deb
 Jilly

Mr. Savin – maths and homeroom teacher at Blue Water High.

TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

CHARACTERS:

- Choose five people from the above list and write a detailed character analysis for each one.
- Draw up a table. In the first column list the names of all the students at the Solar Blue Surf Academy. Alongside each name rule further columns with the following headings, underneath which you list the appropriate information – strengths (list things that are good, positive and nice about the person), weaknesses (list things that are bad, negative and not nice about the person), likeable (list what you especially like about the person), dislikeable (list what you especially dislike about the person), and identifying qualities (list the qualities with which you identify the character and why you identify with these qualities).
- Simmo, Deb and Jilly have the task of teaching and supervising the students of the Academy. How would you describe the relationship each one fosters with the students?
- How would you assess Simmo, Deb and Jilly as role models for the students of the Academy? Draw detailed examples from the text to support your assessments.

GENERAL/MISCELLANEOUS:

- Who was Helen Keller? Write a short biography. In what context does Fly remember this person?
- Outline the history of the Archibald Prize.
- What is a mandala?
- What is a calabash?
- What is Swahili?
- Who wrote *Pride and Prejudice*? What else did she write?
- Who was Ralph Waldo Emerson?
- Who wrote *Tarzan*? Who was he anyway?



VOCABULARY/LANGUAGE:

The author is very generous with her language, which makes the narrative easy to read and relevant to the young reader. She uses many and appropriate colloquialisms, expressions, abbreviations, similes and metaphors that can provide interesting and informative language exercises for students.

- Below is a list of some colloquial words and expressions found in the text. Compile a type dictionary or glossary of these and include the meaning and origin/history for each.

Words: **sanger; toot; antsiness; grommet; git; nong; perv (verb); aggro; scuzzie; toey; skint; scuse; (')cause; mugs; sassy; croppy; psycho; pig; meathead; cranking; smithereens; kisser; swat; sooky; chopper; poofle; pee; nippers; Speedos; suck; dude; chop; mushing; flappers; white-knuckled; klutz; poop; goop; (it) sucks; (be) chipper; (to) cop; sucker; bazillion; bluster; ear-wiggling; wagging; corker; whinging; pash-rash; hanky-panky; slagging; worrywart; nackeded; spunky; pinnie.**

Expressions: **whiner's disease; meat wagon; fancy shmancy; wishing away one's life (p104); Shakespearian theatrics (p109); to take a leak; to slag off; making a meal of something; owning stuff (p128); to be/get off the hook; get a kick in the kisser; digging in one's heels; too sweet for your own good (p162); chief goose; whole kit and caboodle; goofing off; bulls (things) up; fishbowl friendship (p275); cop a drilling; have a short fuse.**

- Define a simile and a metaphor. What is the difference?
- Below are some of the similes and metaphors that appear in the text, together with their page references. Consider these and comment on their appropriateness, and then supply, in context, some alternative similes and metaphors. **felt like...an angry grizzly bear (p22); the green room (p57); night-time cinema (p94); having a nuclear meltdown (p138); green-eyed monster (p188); the washing machine (p207); water escalators (p284).**

GEOGRAPHY/ENVIRONMENT:

- On p16 reference is made to the cold water of the Pacific. Find out why some areas of water along various coastlines are warmer than others? What influences water temperatures in the world's oceans? Is it just the seasons? Why is it that water takes longer to heat up and cool down than the surrounding coastal land surface?
- Fly has an ability to forecast the weather. There actually are people and animals that can sense changes in weather patterns. Find out what indicators, in themselves and in animals, other than those used by scientific climatologists and weather forecasters, some of these people use to predict changes in the weather? How does the more scientific approach work?
- Both Fly and Matt care for their environment. How is this shown in the story?
- George Watson (Fly's Dad) believes in the land serving the man, not the man serving the land. Explain this attitude. Discuss how relevant this is in today's world.
- The days were starting to shrink (p92). As the winter approaches the days become shorter. Describe this phenomenon. How is it caused? Define summer solstice, winter solstice, autumn equinox and spring equinox.
- Draw up a chart of all the different types of sharks, describe each one and include an illustration.
- Discuss what is meant by Nature sometimes being a cruel teacher? (p144)

- When Heath relates the story of Hinemoa and Tutanekai, he mentions the legend was set in Rotorua. Draw a map of New Zealand and mark in Rotorua. Then imagine you are a presenter on *Getaway* or *The Great Outdoors* and describe the place to a prospective tourist.
- Heath is part Maori. Who are the Maoris? How did they get to New Zealand? How did the British colonisation of New Zealand affect the Maoris and their culture? What is the Maori name for New Zealand and what does it mean?
- Cyclone *Leon* plays an important role in the final competition. Find out the following about cyclones: What are they? How do they develop? What are they called in other parts of the world? How are they named?
- Name two famous cyclones that have struck Australia (in Darwin and the banana growing district of Queensland). When did they occur and what made them famous?
- What is a rip?

SURFING AND THE SURFING CULTURE:

- Find the names of famous Australian surfers – male and female, past and present – and write a few biographical lines about each.
- Choose one famous male and female Australian surfing champion and write a biographical essay for each one.
- Research and write a project illustrating the surfing culture of the 1960s. Include information about the professional surf circuit and surfing as a pastime; the emergence of surf music, such as that of the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean; surfing movies such as *Gidget* and *Ride the Wild Surf*.
- Compile an instruction manual on how to surf, the equipment used for surfing and a glossary of expressions used by surfers.
- Make a list of various surfing magazines published for surfers. Write a review on two of these magazines, including the name of the publishers/editors, country of origin, the look of the magazine and the quality of its contents.
- Are surfing academies a fictional fabrication or do they really exist? If so, name some. Perhaps you should also consider institutions such as the Australian Institute of Sport, and find out if surfing is one of their areas of study.
- Using an Atlas, draw/trace a map of the world. Locate and mark in the major surf beaches of the world.

COMPETITION:

- Organise a class competition in which the students produce a surfboard design. This can be an individual art/drawing/painting competition on a piece of paper, or a more complex project involving groups of students who actually build (out of cardboard or balsa wood, or some light and safe material) and paint a design on a model surfboard.
- Students should become organisers of a surf carnival. Various jobs should be assigned to different students: publicity and brochure design; organising beach venue and events; entertainment and catering; accommodation; etc.
- In the various competitions found in the text the competitors reach the finals through a series of heats and eliminations. Do all sporting competitions work this way? Make a list of some major sporting competitions (local and international) in which the winner is decided through a process of elimination.
- There are some competitions where it may not always be the winners of different heats or sections that win the competition; it may be the contestant who consistently scores well and ends up with the most points. List some of the major competitions (local and international) that fall into this category.
- List the characteristics that make a person a gracious winner and a good loser and then list the characteristics that make a person a bad loser and a bad winner.



FEELINGS AND SENSATIONS:

- On p8 Fly comments on the way she feels when walking in the sand in bare feet. On a piece of paper draw a large X and fill in your feelings and sensations about being at the beach. This is similar to a Y chart but with an extra category. In each of the four sections list the following feelings and sensations: how it looks; how it sounds; how it feels; how it smells.
- How does Fly relate to and feel about the water and the beach?
- On p24 Fly mentions near death experiences. What does this mean? Can you relate some examples, maybe personal or about someone you know or have read about?
- What role does desperation play in Fly's attempts to overcome her rivals in competitions? How hungry is she for a win? Why is it difficult for Fly to aim for success?
- What was it about Fly that originally made her a fearless surfer? What happened to change this? How did Fly learn to overcome this fear?
- The students at the academy had to write a short essay on what makes them afraid. Now write your own essay on what makes you afraid, after which the class is divided into groups of about 4 to 6 students. Every member of the group then gets to read his/her essay and help each other work out strategies to overcome their fears.
- How would you describe Fly's self image? How does this manifest itself throughout the story?
- How would you describe Heath's self image? Is he justified? How does he deal with it?
- Find the meaning of the word cathartic. Do you think Fly is having a cathartic experience when painting her surfboard for the auction?
- Discuss what you think is meant by the expression (p174) as much as we all hate fear, we love it too?
- There are two major incidents when the theme of honesty and guilt are introduced. What are these and how does Fly cope with these incidents? What are their outcomes?
- Fly's inner mongrel was Twinkie. Who was Twinkie and what role did he play in Fly's life at the Academy?
- Do you have an inner mongrel? If so, what is it and when did you have occasion to need it?
- Why does Fly feel that winning might not be all it's cracked up to be?
- Write an essay on how you would feel as a winner (of anything – pick something interesting).

OUTLOOK ON LIFE:

- On p2 Fly talks about whiner's disease and being a mistress of suck it up and getting on with it. What first impression of Fly does this create in your mind?
- Early in the book we learn that Fly comes from a large family that lives on a farm in Western Australia. Money is in short supply. What do we learn from Fly's experiences on coping and overcoming such a hardship when something is needed or wanted? For example, how does Fly acquire her surfboard? Or what do you do when you cannot earn enough money to buy something? (See p26).
- Practice makes perfect and the more you do something the easier it becomes. Would this be an apt description for how Fly achieves her ultimate goal? What other elements play their part in the end result?
- It's not only about the destination . . . Sometimes it's just about the journey. (p261/2) What do you think Simmo means by this? When does Fly finally understand what Simmo was trying to tell her.
- Discuss the symbolism of the door (p295), not just for Fly and her friends, but life in general. A door is a threshold. What is the history of the word threshold?



RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIPS:

- On p67 Fly says she loves her father but hated what he thought. Explain what she is trying to say. Draw on your personal experiences and find similar relationships to compare with this one.
- Draw a chart showing the romantic relationships between the students at the Academy. Who pairs off with whom?
- Discuss how the students cope with each other and their idiosyncrasies, and how they are able to maintain close friendships while also being rivals.
- Using boxes and arrows draw a flow chart showing the progress of Fly and Heath's relationship.
- Fly's friends are very considerate about organising a great birthday for her. Why do things not go according to plan?
- Have you ever planned a celebration that has gone awry? If so, write a play describing the events, and if not, make them up. This would be a great opportunity to write a farce. Then put on the play with your classmates.
- The seven grommets are part of a team, and to a certain degree have become a family. What are the benefits and the disadvantages of being in such a large group 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a whole year? On the whole, describe how well, or otherwise, the group integrates.
- Describe the relationship that develops between each of the grommets to each other and as a whole.
- What is Heath trying to teach Fly with his reality check (p89)? How successful is he?

RESPONSIBILITY, FAIRNESS AND CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS:

- Do you think Stacey Jarvis has the potential to become Fly's nemesis? Support your opinions with incidents from the text. Would you call Stacey a good sport? Why?
- What is the meaning and origin of the word sabotage?
- In their own way Anna and Fly and Perri are very caring and considerate of other people. Give examples and discuss how these characteristics are manifested in each girl?
- What lessons do you think the rigorous training schedule, their schoolwork, household responsibilities and community service teach Fly and her fellow students?
- Imagine you are Fly, or one of the other students at the Academy. Draw up a weekly timetable of Fly's activities and responsibilities. Then draw up one for yourself. How do the two timetables compare?



TEACHERS/SUPERVISORS:

- At the Academy Simmo and Deb are in charge of training. How do their approaches and methods differ?
- Demonstrate how (or otherwise) that while Simmo, Deb and Jilly were all teaching, caring for and living together with the students at the Academy, they did not act as their surrogate parents.
- How would you describe Mr Savin as a teacher and a person? Draw on incidents in the text to illustrate your answer.
- Discuss some of the memorable teachers you have come across during your school life. Why have they left an impression – good or bad?
- How do you think their personalities affect the teaching methods used by teachers?
- Write a conversation you imagine would have taken place between Fly and Deb after the incident at the car wash (p85).

NAMES AND NICKNAMES:

Most parents put a lot of effort into choosing names for their children.

- What is Fly's real name? How did she acquire her nickname?
- What about your name – how/why did you acquire it? Does it have a meaning? Are you satisfied with it? Why or why not? What would you rather be called and why? Do you have a nickname? How did you get it and why do you use it?
- How do you think a person gets a nickname? Give some examples. What does changing your name by deed poll mean?
- Find out how/why surnames came into use.

