ALLEN & UNWIN
BOOK PUBLISHERS

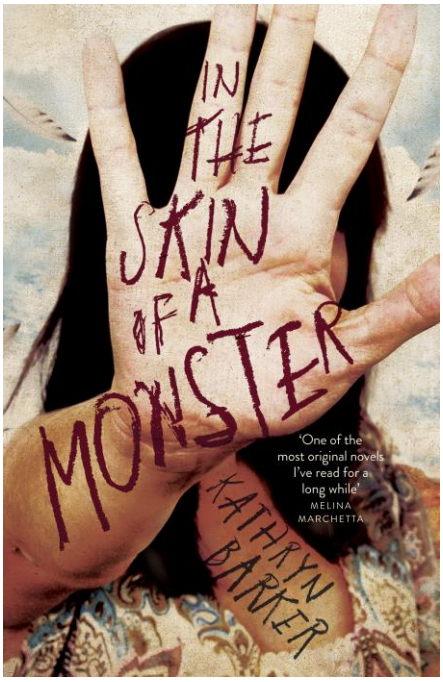
Teachers' Notes
by Lindsay Williams

In the Skin of a Monster
by
Kathryn Barker

ISBN 9781760111717
Recommended for ages 14-18 yrs

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Introduction 2
Plot summary 2
Links to the curriculum 3
Orienting students to the text 4
Reading the text 5
Working with the text 7
Reviewing, consolidating and challenging meaning 9
Further reading 11
About the writers 12
Blackline masters 14, 15



83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest, Sydney
NSW 2065
Australia

PO Box 8500
St Leonards
NSW 1590
Australia

ph: (61 2) 8425 0100
fax: (61 2) 9906 2218

info@allenandunwin.com
www.allenandunwin.com

Allen & Unwin PTY LTD
ABN 79 003 994 278

INTRODUCTION

PLOT SUMMARY

Alice lives with her identical twin sister in the (fictional) outback Australian town of Collector. They attend school in the small town, and her sister has a local boyfriend, fifteen-year-old Jude. Awkwardly for Alice, she is also infatuated with Jude, unknown to either of the others.

Then, a shocking, life-shattering event occurs: Alice's twin steals her father's gun and shoots eight students at the twins' school, including Jude, before killing herself. (This last fact is only revealed later in the book.) The town is shattered, many of the townspeople suffering from terrible nightmares featuring the monstrous sister and the dead children. Their father retreats into himself and will not speak. Alice, the identical twin of the 'monster', is treated with suspicion and even outright hostility. Eventually, a combination of this treatment and an overwhelming sense of guilt leads to a breakdown and Alice spends three years in a sanatorium recovering.

On her release, not much has really changed, especially as she still carries what she regards as a dark secret, the reason for her guilt. Moreoever, she is still regarded with suspicion. And then, her life falls apart for a second time…

This backstory is revealed gradually as events at the centre of the novel unfold.

Most of the novel is set in a menacing dream landscape created by the nightmares of the townspeople after the shooting. This is the main literary conceit of the novel: that our dreams take on some sort of tangible reality in another dimension that 'rubs up' against the real world. Once a fairly benign place, the dreamscape is now a distorted, twisted version of the real Collector and is populated by children like, but unlike, their counterparts in the real world.

This dream land is itself threatened, however. The townspeople have not just dreamed of the dead children, they have also been dreaming – again, and again, and again - about the schoolgirl monster. Consequently, the land has been overrun by violent, psychopathic dream-schoolgirls, intent on killing any other people or creatures in the dream land. Standing between complete disaster and possible salvation are the two monster-hunters: the mysterious creature, Ivan, and his human friend, Lux (named after a box of soap powder he sees lying around after he has been dreamed into existence). Ivan makes Lux think he believes passionately in a prophecy that Lux will save them all by killing the original school-girl monster who can be recognised by a special convict love token worn around her neck.

To complicate matters, the real Alice is accidentally brought into the dream world, in the body of a girl called Kell who she believes is a version of her sister – the version in Ivan's prophecy. Through a series of events, Lux, Ivan and the children under their protection are forced to join forces with Kell-Alice. Ivan makes it clear that this is only until she is killed, as has been prophesied.

However, things appear not to go as planned: Ivan is injured during an attack, and Lux comes to realise there is something different about this schoolgirl; she is not the monster he has come to expect: she refuses a gun and acts out of character. Meanwhile, Alice is trying to come to terms with inhabiting the skin of her hated sister, an experience that leads her to understand what drove her twin to carry out the massacre – and her own role in the terrible event.

Determined that things will happen differently this time, Alice joins forces with an initially reluctant and suspicious Lux (who harbours his own, dark secret) to save the dream world – and her own, real world – where dream-Kell is loose.

This compelling part-fantasy, part-realistic novel explores a range of all-too relevant issues:

- the nature of evil – who are the real monsters? Are they inherently evil?
- nature versus nurture: are we a result of our genes, environment, or a complex combination of both?

- personal, collective and vicarious guilt: is anyone truly innocent of blame when terrible events happen?
- the effects of judging people primarily by their appearance
- the blurry line between love and hate
- the possibilities for redemption
- reactions to traumatic, community events.

Warning: This novel does contain mild coarse language and some sexual references. More importantly, for some students the central event of the massacre may provoke strong reactions. Therefore, teachers should read the book carefully in order to decide on its suitability for their particular contexts.

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

This book will be most relevant for use in English classes. Due to the mature content in the novel, activities in these Teachers' Notes have been designed for use with Year 10 students. However, they can be easily adapted for younger year levels if desired.

Relevant Year 10 content descriptions in the *Australian Curriculum: English* include the following.

Language

- Refine vocabulary choices to discriminate between shades of meaning, with deliberate attention to the effect on audiences (ACELA1571)

Literature

- Reflect on, extend, endorse or refute others' interpretations of and responses to literature (ACELT1640)
- Analyse and explain how text structures, language features and visual features of texts and the context in which texts are experienced may influence audience response (ACELT1641)
- Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (ACELT1812)
- Identify, explain and discuss how narrative viewpoint, structure, characterisation and devices including analogy and satire shape different interpretations and responses to a text (ACELT1642)
- Compare and evaluate how 'voice' as a literary device can be used in a range of different types of texts such as poetry to evoke particular emotional responses (ACELT1643)
- Analyse and evaluate text structures and language features of literary texts and make relevant thematic and intertextual connections with other texts (ACELT1774)
- Create literary texts with a sustained 'voice', selecting and adapting appropriate text structures, literary devices, language, auditory and visual structures and features for a specific purpose and intended audience (ACELT1815)

Literacy

- Plan, rehearse and deliver presentations, selecting and sequencing appropriate content and multimodal elements to influence a course of action (ACELY1751)

- Create sustained texts, including texts that combine specific digital or media content, for imaginative, informative, or persuasive purposes that reflect upon challenging and complex issues (ACELY1756)

ORIENTING STUDENTS TO THE TEXT

Activity One: Personal Responsibility (Anticipation Guide)

Central to the novel are questions about the extent of our personal responsibility. Before reading the novel, encourage students to explore and justify their own opinions. ***BLM1****: Anticipation Guide* will assist students to do this. Once they have had sufficient time for individual contemplation (and to complete the second column of the table), students should discuss their views in small groups. There is no need to reach a consensus at this stage, but students should be encouraged to support their opinions with reference to events in their own lives and the community more generally.

After finishing reading and working through some of the *Working with the Text* activities (below), students can return to this table and complete it.

Activity Two: Frontloading Background Knowledge

As becomes apparent, there is a terrible tragedy at the centre of the events in the novel: a school massacre. Although the story is set in Australia, except for some minor incidents, we have been lucky to escape such tragedies so far. However, they are all too frequent in other places around the world, especially the United States. Before beginning reading, students could be asked to recall any massacres they are aware of, and the impacts they had on the communities involved. If they do not have much background knowledge, it is NOT recommended that students be asked to undertake an unstructured internet search for news stories and videos: many contain disturbing and graphic details and may not be suitable for even older adolescents. However, with some care and sensitivity, the following story may provide useful background that will assist students in understanding the events of the novel and character motivations:

http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/04/01/stockton-massacre-tragically-familiar-pattern-repeats/2043297/

Note well: This activity could be delayed until after page 79 and the secret of the school-girl monster, Kell, has been revealed.

Activity Three: Features of Fantasy and Making Predictions

As a class, brainstorm titles of fantasy stories they have read, seen or played, e.g. the *Harry Potter* series, the *Twilight* series, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* etc. Using these as a starting point, students should work in small groups to develop a poster about fantasy, including:

- a definition
- characteristics
- types of fantasy
- what is valued in fantasy (i.e. rules of behaviour, qualities of heroes etc) and what is rejected (e.g. the behaviours of the enemy).

Display these, discuss the various ideas and then compare their ideas to the following: http://www2.nkfust.edu.tw/~emchen/CLit/Fantasy.htm. Students might also enjoy watching the following YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OebNXFxe79I.

The teacher should point out that this is a supernatural fantasy along the lines of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and the *Mortal Instruments* series. Based on this knowledge, ask students to discuss what they might expect of *In the Skin of a Monster*.

Extension: After reading the novel, discuss the advantages (and disadvantages) of using fantasy to explore controversial subjects such as school massacres and the nature of evil, e.g.:

Pros

- issues such as this give the genre greater gravitas
- issues can be discussed in a less confrontationist way (i.e. because they are not happening in the 'real' world)

Cons

- we may be able to ignore these issues as not really about 'us'
- talk of angels and monsters might trivialise important issues.

Other Frontloading Activities

In this novel, it is unlikely that vocabulary will create a problem for most students. However, the early part of the novel, especially, is quite disorienting (see Activity 5 below) and it may be helpful to prepare students by providing a verbal summary without giving away too many secrets. ***BLM2*** could also be used to provide an overview of the novel's development (at least from Alice's perspective). Finally, the use of alternating narrators (Alice and Lux) could be explained. Having said that, for better readers, part of the pleasure of this novel will come from gradually piecing together the various mysteries at the novel's heart. In addition, the sense of disorientation is an important aspect of the overall effectiveness of the novel.

Finally, convict love tokens play a significant role in the novel. For more information about these, and images of real love tokens, see the website of the National Museum of Australia: http://love-tokens.nma.gov.au.

READING THE TEXT

Activity Four: Reading the Novel

This novel is a good one for whole class study. Alternatively, it could be chosen by students for use as part of a literature circle:

- http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/literature-circles-getting-started-19.html
- http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/literature-circles.

Whichever approach is taken, it may be useful to deliberately slow down student reading and tackle the first 46 pages together. The teacher could read these pages aloud or fluent student readers could be prepared beforehand (and given time to practise) and they could also be involved in reading the novel aloud.

Activity Five: In Medias Res and Creating Reader Disorientation

After page 8, stop and ask students to reflect on:

- What they think they know
- The questions they have at the end of the first chapter

- The direction they predict the story will take.

It might be useful to explain the concept of *in medias res*, a Latin phrase which means 'in the middle of things' (see http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/284369/in-medias-res). In Tolkein's seminal fiction works, he would spend time explaining Hobbits and their background. However, in modern fantasy fiction it is much more common for the writer to plunge straight into the story. At first, the reader feels disoriented and has to work hard to discover what's going on and what the 'rules' of this world are. Students should understand this is normal and certainly applies to the current novel.

Activity Six: The Dream World

On pages 29-33 and pages 36-44, Alice makes the transition from the real to the dream world. Read these pages carefully. It might be worthwhile spending some time examining how the line between the real and dream worlds is blurred. For example, at the end of Alice's chapter on page 44 are the lines:

> *It worked though. Marcus positioned himself just outside the doorway and shouted 'Stay back, or else!'*

Then, on page 45 Lux takes over as narrator and his chapter begins with the lines:

> *'Stay back, or else!' comes a shaky threat from somewhere nearby.*

Students can work in small groups to find other examples.

Then, if desired, students could make some connections with their own world: ask them to recall a dream or nightmare they have experienced. (Perhaps they could be asked to keep a dream diary for the duration of reading the novel.) Students could be asked to imagine the consequences if their dream were to become a reality; this could be in the form of a piece of writing, an image or even a comic strip.

Activity Seven: Gradual Accumulation of Details

To assist students make sense of the novel, they can use ***BLM2****: Alice's Journey Through the Novel*. They can work in small groups to summarise what they are learning as the novel unfolds.

Extension: BLM2 is based on Alice's journey. After finishing the novel, students could be fruitfully asked to consider how this outline might need to be changed if it was based on Lux's journey instead, e.g. obviously stage one would be his creation in the dream world.

Additionally, the teacher and students might like to work together to write questions to which they need to find answers, e.g.

- Who is Alice?
- Who is the Schoolgirl monster?
- Given that there are a number of monsters in the book, who or what is the monster referred to in the title of the novel? (Pages 148-149 are particularly interesting to re-read in this regard.) Moreoever, why would someone want to climb into the skin of a monster?
- To whom is Alice talking? (This is finally revealed on page 40.) Why?
- For the various characters in the dream world, who are their counterparts in the real world?
- What is the mystery associated with Lux? (On pages 142-143, the reader finally discovers that he is an 'angel'. However, on page 146, Alice makes the tantalising comment: 'If I'd turned around I would have gotten a good and proper look at Lux standing there, naked from the waist up, wings stretched out like a beaten-up angel. Maybe if I'd seen him in that context, I would have made the connection.')

Activity Eight: Mapping the Dream Landscape

The landscape of the dream world may seem quite chaotic to readers. So, individually or in small groups, students could be asked to create an annotated map as they read the novel. This should show key locations as well as their spatial relationship to each other.

Extension: Trace the route that one or (using different colours) more characters take through this landscape. If desired, students could create a similar map for the 'real' world.

WORKING WITH THE TEXT

There is a great deal going on in this novel and the following activities provide advice on some fruitful avenues for close study. However, there are other aspects that might also be explored in more detail, e.g.

- The role of nature and nurture: can we escape our genetic destiny? For example, see the chapter beginning page 95
- The notion of hate as a 'gateway drug' (see page 94).

Activity Nine: Visualising the Plot

Once students have finished reading the novel, as a class or in small groups, they should decide on and justify which are the key scenes (e.g. Jude and Alice not taking seriously Alice's sister's request for help to get away; the massacre; parents' reaction to the death of their children; Alice in the sanatorium; Alice's transition to the dream world etc). Based on a close reading of the appropriate pages of the novel, they can create a series of tableaux to create a physical representation of that event. Further information about this technique can be found here: http://www.learner.org/libraries/makingmeaning/makingmeaning/dramatic/?pop=yes&pid=1824.

Activity Ten: Consolidating Understanding of the Story

There is often a difference between a novel's story (i.e. the chronological unfolding of events in a larger sense) and the plot (i.e. how events unfold in the actual novel). We have already seen, for instance, that fantasy novels – such as *In the Skin of a Monster* - can plunge the reader right into the main events and reveal the backstory through flashbacks etc.

So, after reading *In the Skin of a Monster* and using the completed BLM2 to assist, students can create a chronological timeline of the events around which the novel is based. The starting point could be Alice's sister and Jude becoming boyfriend and girlfriend; there is probably no need to go back as far as the birth of the twins. For information on creating interactive, digital timelines, see: http://elearningindustry.com/top-10-free-timeline-creation-tools-for-teachers.

Activity Eleven: The Clues Are in Our Names

(a) ***Focus on Alice:*** As a class, discuss what they know of the Lewis Carroll novel, *Alice in Wonderland*. Then, from a recent film version watch this clip where Alice falls into the rabbit hole: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNXpnufLVkc. Discuss the similarities between the Alice character in Lewis's tale and *In the Skin of a Monster*:

- What type of rabbit hole has the latter Alice fallen into?
- Who or what is the metaphorical rabbit she is chasing?

The following quote from *Alice in Wonderland* might be worth considering:

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

- To what extent does this resonate with Barker's Alice?

(b) ***Focus on Lux:*** Re-read page 19 to discover from where his name comes. For students not familiar with Lux, this product website might be a useful reference: http://www.pental.com.au/brand/lux/. Given what happens in the book, students should consider what qualities the angel Lux might share with the soap flakes. Take, for example, the product slogan: 'For the special things that deserve the very best of care'. In what sense and to what extent is Lux (the character) responsible for helping Alice 'cleanse' herself? In exploring this question, students should re-read the following passages:

- pages 72-73 where Alice reflects:

  I looked down at my hands. Except that of course they weren't my hands, not really. The dirt under the nails wasn't there from anything that I'd done, and the scars weren't from cuts that I'd felt. The bandage wasn't covering a wound that that I'd *been given. But it was what I* couldn't *see that had me worried. As I stared down at those hands I couldn't help wondering what terrible deeds they might have done without me knowing.*
  You're probably thinking that my own hands weren't exactly 'clean' in the scheme of things, and Lord knows that you're right. At least I knew their story, though…

- page 253, especially where Alice says: 'I turned back to Lux. He was standing against the side of a washing machine, hands in his pockets, waiting.'

Note: There is (at least) one more reference to cleanliness right at the end of the novel on page 294: '…I squirted some dishwashing liquid into the pan, so that the bubbles could work on the grime overnight.'

The teacher should ensure that she makes explicit to students that making connections across the text is one of the crucial skills of good readers; this is, of course, one strategy for inferring.

Activity Twelve: Narration

The novel is structured around alternating chapters with two different narrators, Alice (from the real world) and Lux (from the dream world). There are at least two main strengths of this approach:

- It provides the reader with different points of view on the same events. This, in turn, means that certainties are unsettled.
- A vehicle exists for easily giving the reader a more complete picture of events, i.e. what one character might not know, the other character might.

In order to discuss these ideas and evaluate the effectiveness of the approach, students could first be asked to complete one (or both) of the following activities:

a) Rewrite part of the story from the point of view of ONE of the characters only.

b) Rewrite part of the story from the point of view of a character other than Lux or Alice.

Discuss the differences these changes make to the story.

Activity Thirteen: Possible Meanings of the Novel

Based on the discussions so far, ask students to return to ***BLM1****: Anticipation Guide*. Individually, students should now complete the final two columns and then discuss the responses in small groups. In preparation, students might find it useful to re-read pages:

- 88 ('I wanted to tell him no…did nothing to deserve to die.')
- 265-274 (the whole chapter)
- 284 ('And here's the thing…would make the right one')
- and 296 ('Because here's the thing, dear sister…or just on your miserable self').

Note: Of course, depending on students' background, knowledge and values, the novel may also mean other things for them. So, while the *Anticipation Guide* sets up particular parameters for discussing the novel, teachers should remain open to differing approaches and meanings.

REVIEWING, CONSOLIDATING AND CHALLENGING MEANING

The following activities are designed to help students synthesise all that they have been learning and thinking about so far. Teachers could choose all or some of these activities.

Activity Fourteen: Reflection through Hot Seat Roleplay

Based on their previous discussions and close study of the novel, volunteer students can take on the role of characters from the novel, especially Alice's sister, Alice, Marcus, Kell etc. In small groups, students can prepare questions to ask the characters, and consider possible answers. Then, conduct a hot seat roleplay. For more information, see:

- http://www.dramatoolkit.co.uk/drama-strategies/hot-seating
- http://dramaresource.com/drama-strategies/hot-seating/.

During the roleplay, audience members should feel free to ask follow up questions and be prepared to challenge the students-in-role (especially on errors in fact or questionable interpretations of motives etc).

Activity Fifteen: Secrets of Successful Teen Fiction

Ask students to read this article from the American journal, *The Atlantic*: http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/10/the-8-habits-of-highly-successful-young-adult-fiction-authors/280722/. In the article, two best-selling young adult authors explore some key elements for writing successful fiction for teenagers (including stories set in fantasy worlds). For comparison, students might also read the following: http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/writing-young-adult-fiction-for-dummies-cheat-shee.html.

Working in groups, students should summarise the ideas contained in one or both of these articles, then discuss:

- Do they agree with these authors' views?
- From their perspective, would they change or add anything?

Students should now compile a file set of criteria for good, young adult fiction (with a focus on fantasy, if desired).

Finally, based on the their final criteria (their own set of 'Habits of Highly Successful YA Authors'), they evaluate the success of *In the Skin of a Monster*. These evaluations can be used to assist students in the following two activities.

Activity Sixteen: Create a Book Trailer

Based on students' understandings of the novel, they can now create a book trailer designed to encourage others to read *In the Skin of a Monster*. More information can be found here:

- http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers
- http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents/how-to-make-a-book-trailer-6-tips
- http://www.thecreativepenn.com/2008/12/03/book-trailers-11-steps-to-make-your-own/
- http://thewritelife.com/free-apps-for-book-trailer/.

Find suitable ways to publish the trailers, for example on the school library's website.

Extension: Create book trailers for good books to read after finishing *In the Skin of a Monster*. The books should be related in some way, especially themes and issues, the nature of the characters and the problems they face.

Activity Seventeen: Create a Panel Review

As well as encouraging others to read the book, students should reflect critically on *In the Skin of a Monster*. A fun, interactive way to accomplish this is by involving students in a panel discussion, like those seen on the ABC's 'The Book Club'. Sample videos of series (hosted by Jennifer Byrne) can be found here: http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/video/. The following web page might also be useful: http://www.scottkirsner.com/panels.htm. While it is specifically oriented towards professional panels at industry conferences etc, it contains a great deal of practical and sensible advice that can be adapted for school settings.

Tips:

- Assign students specific roles, e.g. moderator, Kathryn Barker (the author), a professional reviewer, a psychologist, a member of the Collector community. This way, the students can respond to the book from a series of different perspectives.
- Ask students to prepare a one to two-minute, initial response and one question for another panellist. After students present their response and panellists start asking questions of each other, the discussion will become free-flowing and engaging very quickly.

Activity Eighteen: Taking Responsibility for Our Actions

Finally, students could be asked to use what they have learnt about the nature of personal and collective responsibility to write a blog-style column discussing the role individuals can play in making the world a better place. To give the piece clear direction, they could focus on one of the following topics: war, terrorism, civil massacre, global warming, mistreatment of refugees, schoolyard bullying, or natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

Advice on writing blogs can be found here:

- http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/writing-a-good-blog.html
- http://writetodone.com/3-secrets-to-writing-blog-posts-that-go-viral/
- http://www.inc.com/ss/8-tips-for-effective-social-blogging?slide=1#0.

FURTHER READING

As a follow-up to *In the Skin of a Monster*, students might enjoy some of the following.

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee**

This is the classic tale of race relations in the south of the United States of America. As well as dealing with similar issues of the nature of personal responsibility and the effects of violence on a small community, one of the main characters, the lawyer Atticus Finch says to his daughter: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." This is, of course, resonates with Alice's experience.
http://www.amazon.com/To-Kill-Mockingbird-Harper-Lee/dp/0446310786

***The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green**

From a somewhat different perspective, this novel explores the lives of two, teenage cancer survivors who have experienced social isolation due to their illness. It explores themes that will resonate with the story of Alice, her sister and Jude: Will I be loved? Will I be remembered? Will I leave a mark on this world (and will that mark be good or bad)?

http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9780143567592/fault-our-stars.

***City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare**

This is the first book in *The Mortal Instruments* series. Like *In the Skin of a Monster*, it is a supernatural fantasy with the ever-popular forbidden love element built in. It is reminiscent in some respects of the *Twilight* series, but far better written and much more likely to appeal to both boys and girls.

***Unearthly* by Cynthia Hand**

In this novel (another that is the first in a series), teenage girl Clara Gardner discovers she is part angel. A bit like Lux, she must discover her purpose and along the way there is the ubiquitous love triangle.

http://www.cynthiahandbooks.com

***Dreamrider* by Barry Jonsberg** (Allen & Unwin, 2006)

The protagonist is a bullied school boy trapped between reality and fantasy, who 'lucid dreams', that is, is conscious of his dreams and, to a certain extent, able to control them. He discovers he can also control the real world via his dreams.

https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/childrens/young-adult-fiction/Dreamrider-Barry-Jonsberg-9781741144611

YA novels that involve 'dream worlds'

Below is a list of YA novels that involve dream worlds, although that's where the similarity with 'Monster' ends. These books (which usually have a strong fantasy element) tend to focus on a protagonist who has a special magical power and can enter and/or manipulate dreams.

Dream Boy by Mary Crockett (Sourcebooks Fire, 2014)

Gemma Doyle Trilogy by Libba Bray (Random House, 2003-2007)

Only Ever Always by Penni Russon (Allen & Unwin, 2011)

Dream Weaver by Su Williams (Self published, 2013)

ABOUT THE WRITERS

KATHRYN BARKER

Kathryn Barker was born in Canberra, but growing up there was plenty of travel. She started primary school in Tokyo (the only kid with a sandwich in her lunchbox) and finished high school in the woods outside Olympia, Washington (aka that rainy place where Twilight was set). In the years that followed she went to University, became a lawyer, changed her mind, re-trained as a film producer and worked in television. After all of that, she finally mustered the guts to do the one thing she'd always *really* wanted to do – write a young adult novel. It was hard – way harder than she ever imagined, and far more time consuming… but she loved it anyway. As in, 'set the alarm for 4am so there's enough time to write' kind of loved it. Kathryn currently lives in Sydney with her family and *In the Skin of a Monster* is her first novel.

What Kathryn says about…

Writing the book

In the Skin of a Monster was written in spare moments and, given that I don't have too many of those, it took a really long time to finish. It took even longer because, when I was finally happy with the story, I sent it to a script assessor who was absolutely brutal. It turned out I wasn't as thick-skinned as I'd thought. In a moment of crushing self-doubt, I put the book in a bottom drawer and tried my hand at writing rhyming picture books instead. It was more than two years before I mustered the guts to dig the novel out again and work on it a whole lot more.

Motivations

As for motivations, when I started thinking about *In the Skin of a Monster* I didn't consciously set out to explore the fall-out from a school shooting. Like so many aspects of the book, the formative events evolved and unfolded over time. It's fair to say, though, that school shootings have always held a particular horror for me. First as a teenager and now as a parent, I find the idea of a kid taking a gun to school uniquely terrifying. As in, 'speaks to everything that's wrong with the world and chills me to the bone' kind of terrifying. I suppose that, in writing my first novel, I wanted to dig deep and be brave and explore the things that really scared me… hence the choice of subject matter.

Inspirations

As for inspirations, I was at a dinner party a few years ago and the woman sitting next to me was criticizing a recent WWII film. She insisted it was 'appalling' to humanize a Nazi, in any context, to any extent, regardless of circumstances. Even at the time, something about the comment bothered me. It's not that I would ever want to defend the atrocities of that regime – the very opposite, in fact. It just seemed to me that if you systematically dehumanized everyone who did something horrific then you ran the risk of seeing them as 'other'. Of seeing them as nothing but monsters, quite separate from 'us'… and wasn't that dangerous? Isn't it safer to acknowledge that terrible acts are committed by *people*, sometimes even seemingly ordinary people? Isn't *that* more likely to keep us vigilant and (hopefully) improving? It was tricky territory and I wasn't entirely sure whether I knew the answer, so I kept on asking myself the question… and sure enough that question eventually found its way into my story.

The major themes of the book

In the Skin of a Monster explores the fall-out from a school shooting with creativity, delving into both the conscious and the subconscious damage.

In the Skin of a Monster moves beyond the tired black and white of 'good versus evil' and poses the much more terrifying question: Are we good or bad…*or neither?*

In the Skin of a Monster pushes the idea of 'judging a person based on how they look' to the ultimate extreme, resulting in an in-depth exploration of perception and self-image.

Journeys of self-discovery are nothing new in the young-adult genre, but *In the Skin of a Monster* gives us something fresh – a girl with a genuine reason to fear what she might find.

In the Skin of a Monster is a book for all the outsiders – the ones of us who've been spat on or hated or felt like they didn't belong.

In the Skin of a Monster delves into what it feels like to doubt yourself and blame yourself and maybe even hate yourself… then how to claw your way back from that place.

In the Skin of a Monster is a story about running away in all of its various forms… and what it *really* takes to finally stop.

In the Skin of a Monster is a story about destiny and the power we all have to choose our own paths, even when it feels like the whole world – or even whole *worlds* – are against us.

LINDSAY WILLIAMS

Lindsay has been teaching English for over thirty years and was a classroom teacher and Head of English in both state and private schools for many of those years. In that time, he was also extensively involved in syllabus development at a state and national level. Currently, he is undertaking his PhD through the University of New England, coordinates and teaches English curriculum to pre-service teachers at the University of Queensland, and runs his own consultancy providing professional development in literacy and English. In addition, he works freelance producing curriculum resource materials. For Allen and Unwin, he has produced numerous Teachers' Notes, including for novels such as *Jameela*, *Song of the Slums*, *Darius Bell and the Glitter Bees* and *Louis Beside Himself,* and the picture book of *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*. He can be followed on twitter: @Lindsayguru.

Anticipation Guide

This activity will allow you to start exploring and thinking about issues raised in the novel, In the Skin of a Monster *by Kathryn Barker.*

Before reading: Read each of the statements below (see the first column of the table) and, individually, decide with which ones you agree and disagree (write *agree* or *disagree* in the second column). Then, in small groups, discuss your responses and the reasoning behind your decisions. Where possible, draw on examples from your life.

After reading: Return to this table and, in small groups, decide whether or not Kathryn Barker, is likely to agree or disagree with each statement. Provide evidence from the novel to support your decisions.

	Before Reading	**After Reading**	
Statements	**Do you personally agree or disagree?**	**Do you think Kathryn Barker would agree or disagree?**	**Evidence from novel to support your opinion**
We are responsible for our own actions & behaviours.			
We are responsible for the actions & behaviours of family members.			
We are responsible for the actions & behaviours of friends.			
I can personally prevent terrible things* happening in the world.			
It is important to understand events from the point of view of other people.			
Evil humans (‘monsters’) are born not made.			

* For example: wars, terrorism, massacres, global warming, mis-treatment of refugees, bullying, an earthquake, a tsunami.

Alice's Journey through the Novel

Based on Alice's journey, the table below breaks the novel into (rough) stages, i.e. meaningful structural 'chunks'. The table also provides space for you to:

- make notes and summarise events as you read
- record significant discoveries about Alice and Lux, and to note any changes they undergo as the novel progresses.

When finished, in small groups discuss the following:

- Do you agree with the placement of the stages in the story? If not, what changes would you make?
- What changes would you make to the table if it were constructed from the perspective of Lux's journey?

Stages of the Novel **(Alice's Journey)**	**Events in Novel**	**Discoveries about, and changes in, Alice**	**Discoveries about, and changes in, Lux**
Alice in the Real World (p. 1)			
Transitioning to the Dream Land (Starting from 'You were all weirdly see-through…' on p. 6)			
In Dream Land: In the Skin of the Monster (p. 36)			
Salvation and Redemption (Starting p. 256)			
Coda: Six Months Later (starting p. 275)			