

# Devil's Ballast

## MEG CADDY

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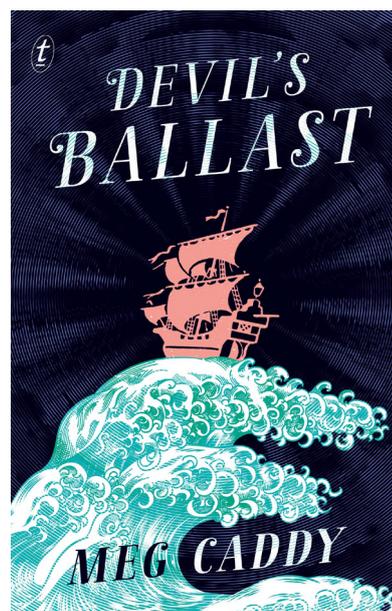
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

*The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.*

*The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.*

### SYNOPSIS

It's the 18th century and pirates control most of the Caribbean. Irish woman Anne Bonny has escaped her abusive drunkard husband aboard a pirate ship with her lover, Calico Jack.

She is determined to build a fleet of pirate ships and travel the Caribbean plundering treasure. Unfortunately, pirate hunter Jonathan Barnet has been employed by Anne's husband to track her down and hold her, along with Calico Jack and his crew, accountable for piracy.

A rollicking adventure on the high seas that explores a woman's need for freedom and independence but also how what is right and wrong, can sometimes look like the same thing. Based on real events and the historical figures of Anne Bonny, Jack Rackham and Mary Read.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meg Caddy is a bookseller by day and a boarding-school tutor by night. Her first book, *Waer*, was shortlisted for the 2013 Text Prize and the 2017 CBCA Children's Book Awards. She lives with two rescue cats and an ever-expanding bookshelf.

### BEFORE READING

1. Have a class discussion inquiring about what students already know about pirates. This could include when they were most prominent, where they mostly sailed and were they good or bad? How do we view pirates now?
2. What qualities does a hero have? What qualities does a villain have? Make a list of defining traits before considering how these two archetypes can be similar and different.
3. Unpack the book cover and title as a class. What is the 'Devil's Ballast'? Research the term and record your definition.

### WHILE READING

1. There will be a number of unfamiliar sailing terms as you are reading the novel. Develop a glossary of sailing terms and definitions as you read. Words could include mutiny, avast, sangrenel and companionway.
2. 'A black field; a skull above two crossed cutlasses.' (pg. 8) The symbolism of the pirate flag is an iconic one. Draw your own flag and annotate the symbolism of the skull and cutlasses. What message is this intended to send to others?
3. 'And while all pirates were, of course, an affront to God, a female pirate was a particular abomination.' (pg.11)



Why is a female pirate even worse than a male pirate? Consider the historical context of the novel to inform your answer.

4. What are 'articles' and what do they determine on board a ship?
5. 'Had he even noticed I was missing?' (pg. 43) Despite Bonny leaving her life in Nassau for Calico, she still holds reservations about the relationship. What doubts does Bonny have about Calico?
6. 'The sea took him whole and the *Ranger* ploughed over him.' (pg. 49) Did Sedlow deserve to die? In your opinion, did his actions warrant his murder?
7. 'That made sense to me. I had spent the last few months sailing with louts and thugs, but at least they never pretended to be anything else. They didn't try to justify it with King and Country.' (pg. 95) How do the characters in the novel attempt to justify their actions? Are there valid justifications provided for piracy or hunting pirates?
8. "'Shame settles deeper than anger.'" (pg. 107) What do you believe motivates Barnet more in his hunt for revenge: shame or anger?
9. Throughout the novel, Bonny refers to 'decent' men and 'good' men. What makes a man decent in your opinion?

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. Despite both Bonny and Read pretending to be men, Bonny states that Read is different from her. How is he different from Bonny?
2. How are flashbacks used as a characterisation technique to provide insight into the character of Bonny and Barnet?
3. 'Just another filthy pirate. Godless. Defiant. Murderous.' (pg. 78) How is Barnet's assessment of Bonny true but also false?

### STYLE & STRUCTURE

1. The novel shifts between two first-person narrators, Bonny and Barnet. Why has Caddy elected to tell this story with two alternating perspectives? What effect does this have with the reader?
2. Dialogue and sensory imagery dominates most of the novel. What is the effect of these techniques in engaging the reader?
3. A number of settings are visited in the novel. How do these settings reflect but also enhance the plot at particular points?

### THEMES

#### Love

1. 'And you're the one who saved me. I tried to put that out of my mind. I didn't like being beholden

to him.' Why does Bonny feel uncomfortable that Calico saved her?

2. 'Ah, Calico. I came to sea with you, didn't I?' (pg. 75) What was the main motivating factor for Bonny leaving Nassau, her love for Calico or her own desire for freedom?
3. 'Stolen ships were the easiest to love.' (pg. 232) How do ships symbolise women in the novel?

### Freedom and oppression

1. While the breast bindings used by Bonny and Read are used to physically mask their gender, on a bigger scale, what might this symbolise?
2. "'Then there's nothing more to be said on the matter. I'll be damned if I'm going to stay on land and keep house for you while you sail around the world having adventures. No. If you're at sea, I'm at sea.' (pg. 58) How does Bonny defy the expectations of a woman in the 18th century?
3. 'It was bitter to know that even now my fate was bound to my husband's.' (pg. 84) Research the rights and power a husband had over his wife in 18th century England.

## RESPONDING

1. *Devil's Ballast* is a work of historical fiction. What are the conventions of fiction? Research the real life of Anne Bonny and write a historical account of her life, utilising the conventions of this text type. Which text type do you believe provides a more intimate understanding of Anne Bonny?
2. While on the *Kingston*, Bonny remarks 'the balance of power on a ship was a fragile thing and, for a sick, wild, exciting moment, I thought they might mutiny.' (pg. 4) What does a captain need to do (or not do) to ensure his crew doesn't rebel? Write an extended written response providing reasons and examples from the novel to illustrate your ideas.
3. Barnet refers to his men as 'Men of God. Men of war.' (pg. 9) What contradiction (if any) is in this statement? Can an individual take life and still be morally right? Explore this idea in an extended written response.
4. 'He was not a man who enjoyed violence, but he conceded its necessity.' (pg. 77) Both the pirates and Barnet are guilty of killing. In your opinion, can violence ever be validated by necessity? Research world examples to support your logic.
5. "'Stay alive, you hear me? I want to hear about you from all corners of the ocean. Make 'em scared.'" (pg. 230) Write an imaginative piece set after the novel ends. What do you think happened to Bonny, Calico and Read?