

Paperchase

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Synopsis

When Gemma comes home from school at lunchtime to check up on her older sister Brianna who has been sick, the last thing she expects to find is her sister packing her bags. Bree has had a fight with her mother's sleazy boyfriend Joe and is sporting a black eye and a split lip. Convinced that Joe owes her, Bree steals several wads of cash that she finds hidden in a box behind her mother's dresser. The cash is Australian, which is convenient because that's exactly where Bree plans to run away to. The girls' father, who they have not seen for years, lives in Melbourne.

Gemma is worried about her sister, who has a tendency towards being a drama queen. So she decides to tag along. Things don't work out exactly as planned however. Their father no longer lives in Melbourne and the girls board a train and cross the beautiful red Nullarbor heading for Adelaide. It soon becomes clear to Gemma that Bree has not been entirely honest with her. The real reason she wants to go to Melbourne is to visit talent agencies to launch her acting career. The train ride to Adelaide is more about hanging out with her new friend Liam than finding their father.

Meanwhile Gemma's return to Australia is triggering memories that she tried to bury. She begins to remember her life with her mother and father, her uncle Tony and her grandmother. Gradually the story of how she received the scars on her face emerges and it becomes clear that in many ways Gemma blames herself for her parents' divorce. Gemma has not been consciously aware of the depth of her loneliness and how much she misses her estranged father, but her pain is clear for others to see because it presents itself in her artwork. When Gemma learns that her father is an artist too, she feels a connection with him and desperately wants to reunite with him. Maybe meeting her father again can help her lay her long held fears to rest.

But time is running out for the girls. Unbeknownst to them, the money that Bree stole from Joe is counterfeit and the girls have left a paper trail across Australia that the police are following. They are in deep trouble. Will they reunite with their father and return safely to New Zealand, or will the Feds catch up with them first?

Text Type

Paperchase is the story of two sisters' journey to find their estranged father. It is an exciting adventure story that will appeal particularly to adolescent girls. The story is told in first person point of view with Gemma, the younger sister, being the narrator. Through Gemma we learn how difficult it can be to control an older sister whose dramatic flair and vivid imagination have the potential to land them in escalating trouble. Also, Gemma has developing artistic qualities that give her an appreciation of the country she is seeing, and her sketches of little things along the way illustrate each chapter. The two sisters are vastly different and despite the fact that Gemma is younger, she is often the voice of reason.

Ironically it is Bree's idea to search for their estranged father, but it is Gemma who will benefit the most from reconnecting with him. Her physical journey across Australia is being mirrored by a spiritual journey. Gemma's memories begin to surface and she is forced to confront them and come to terms with the real reason behind her parents' divorce.

Themes include family relationships, sibling friendship and rivalry, the negative effects of being separated from a parent, trust, honesty and being accountable for your actions.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-32), Chapters 3-6 (pp. 33-153), Chapters 7-8 (pp. 154-238) and Chapters 9-Epilogue (pp. 239-315).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions and discuss their ideas. Have them study the characters and track how they develop and change. Students should look at how the author creates contrast between the sisters and the relationship between them. Encourage students to make predictions and wherever possible relate the adventures of the two sisters to their own experience. Students should be able to identify the important themes in the novel and understand the techniques that the author uses to create tension.

Introducing the Novel

Discussion

Study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who are the two main characters in the novel?
- Where is Brianna running to? Why does Gemma decide to get involved?
- Where do you think Bree stole the money from to finance the trip?
- What "misadventures" do you think the girls are going to have? Where do you think the dangerous place that Gemma wanted to forget is?

- Why do you think the novel is called *Paperchase*?
- Have you ever been in the position where you've wanted to run away from home? If so, what made you feel this way? Describe what happened.

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-32) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-32)

- Who is the narrator of the story? What does she think about as she sits on the plane?
- Where are the girls headed? What does Gemma accidentally leave behind on the plane? Why is this important?
- Why does Gemma need to rush home and see Brianna at lunchtime?
- Who is Josh? Why is Gemma such good friends with him?
- What does Gemma notice about Bree when she goes home for lunch that alarms her? How does Gemma react to what she sees?
- Who is responsible for Bree's injuries?
- Why does Bree hate Joe so much?
- Why is Bree so determined to run away?

Discussion

- What are your initial reactions towards Gemma and Bree? Describe what they are like. How are they different? What do we know about them so far?
- What situation have we been presented with that is going to be the catalyst for the action that follows?
- Describe what we know about Joe. Have you ever been in a similar position to Bree's where you don't like your parent's new partner? How was the situation resolved?
- How does Bree feel about her mother at the moment?
- Predict what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 3-6 (pp. 33-153) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3-6 (pp. 33-153)

- Why does Bree believe that her mother has changed? How does Gemma feel about what Bree is saying?
- Why does Gemma suspect that Bree picked a fight with Joe?
- How does Gemma feel when she realises that Gemma wants to leave home? How does Bree try and comfort her?
- Where does Bree plan to run away to? Why is Gemma surprised about this?

- How does Gemma convince Bree that she should accompany her? What does the fact that Gemma wants to speak to their mother suggest about her character?
- Where does Bree find the money? Is she justified in taking it? Why/why not? Where do you think Joe got the money from?
- What memories start to come back to Gemma while she is at the airport? Why do you think she tries to block the memories? What is significant about what Gemma remembers?
- What memory returns to Gemma about the cabin by the lake? What important people does she suddenly remember? How do you think Gemma managed to forget these family members?
- What does Gemma notice about her old family home that surprises her? What news does Mrs Sandford give the girls about their father? How do they react to this news? Where has their father moved to?
- What startling information do Gemma and Bree learn from the housekeeper? How does Gemma feel about this news?
- Why does Bree have doubts about going to Adelaide to see their father? How does Gemma convince her to stick to the original plan?
- What does Gemma remember about Uncle Tony on the train? What does Bree tell Gemma about their father?
- How does the Aboriginal woman arrive at the train station? Who do you think she is and why is she on the train?
- What does Bree reveal to Gemma about the real reason for the trip to Australia in the station toilets? What does this suggest about her character?
- Why is Bree so concerned about the state of her face? What solution does Gemma come up with?
- Describe the girls' encounter with Mrs Bryson. What new information do they learn from her? Why have Adam and Antony had a falling out? Where does Melody think Adam is living now?
- How does Gemma react when she sees the sign advertising the art exhibition? What is Bree's attitude towards Gemma's enthusiasm?
- Describe the guy that Gemma sees Bree talking to after she comes out of the art exhibition. What is his name? Why does Gemma take an instant dislike to him?
- Why is Bree so indecisive after they find out that their father is no longer living in Adelaide? What does Gemma want to do? What course of action does Bree eventually decide on? Why doesn't she consult Gemma before making the decision? Why does Gemma feel manipulated by her sister?

Discussion

- How old was Gemma when she left Australia? Why do you think she is no longer in contact with her father? How do you think being estranged from her father has affected her life?
- Describe Gemma's relationship with Bree. Gemma is 5 years younger than her sister but in some ways she is more sensible and mature. Find

evidence in the novel that supports this statement. Why is there conflict between the sisters?

- Is Bree a drama queen? Explain your answer.
- Describe Bree's relationship with her mother. Why does Gemma think that Bree is trying to "punish" her? Is Bree being fair to her mother? Why/why not? What could she have done other than run away to try and solve her problem?
- What do you think happened to Gemma to cause the scars on her face?
- Gemma and Bree's parents never discussed the reasons for their divorce with their daughters. Why do you think this was? Do you believe that parents should be open with their children or should relationship issues remain between the parents? Explain your answer.
- Predict what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 7-8 (pp. 154-238) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 7-8 (pp. 154-238)

- Describe what Gemma sees when she looks out the train window. How does Gemma's attitude towards her surroundings differ from Bree's? Why do you think this is?
- What phone message does Derek pass on to the girls? Who left the message? Why are the girls so confused by the message?
- What emotion comes through in Gemma's pole sketch? Why do you think Gemma feels this emotion?
- Who does Gemma spot when the train stops at Cook? Why is she so convinced that he is following them? How does Bree react to Gemma's concerns? Why do you think she reacts like this?
- What happens to Charlie at Kalgoorlie? Who hassles Gemma when she wanders off on her own? Who tries to help her? Why doesn't Gemma trust him?
- What does Liam reveal to Gemma about the "coincidence" that they are on the same train? How does Gemma's opinion of Liam change after she talks to him?
- What does Liam mouth to Bree that suggests to Gemma that her sister has known all along that he was on board? Why did Bree keep this information from Gemma? How does Bree try and justify her actions?
- Who came and visited the girls while they were in town? What decision does Bree make about meeting Ms Devereux?
- Explain how Gemma's face was injured. What does Gemma remember about why her parents split up that shocks her? How did Gemma's life change after she was released from hospital?
- Why did Gemma blame herself for her parents' divorce? What made her block out the memories of that time?
- Why does the train slow down? What does Gemma see out the window that inspires her to draw?

- How does Bree find out their father's address?
- Who offers to give the girls a lift into the city? Why is Gemma reluctant to take up this offer?
- Describe the girls' father's house. Why does Gemma have so much trouble believing that her father would live there?
- Who do the girls meet outside their father's house? What news does he give them about their father?
- Why is Gemma so shocked when she finds out that her father is an artist? Why does Gemma feel betrayed by Bree and her mother?
- What does Bree organise for the girls to do after their unsuccessful visit to their father? Why is Gemma not surprised to learn that Liam is travelling back east with them?
- Who answers the phone when Gemma tries to contact her mother? Why does she immediately hang up?
- How does Liam react when Bree tells him the whole story about the money and the trip? Do you agree with Liam when he says "nothing's for free"? Explain your answer.

Discussion

- What does Gemma include in her notes to Joshua? Why do you think she feels the need to write her thoughts and feelings down? Why can't she discuss them with Bree? What do we learn about Gemma from these notes?
- Gemma and Bree still haven't contacted their mother. How do you think she will be feeling? Do you think Joe will confess to her about his role in the girls' disappearance? Why/why not?
- Gemma feels a connection with her father when she finds out that he is an artist. Describe the rush of emotions that she feels at her father's house. What questions does she want to ask him? How do you think she feels knowing that her father is thousands of kilometres away and she is unlikely to reconnect with him? Do you think Bree understands how Gemma feels? Why/why not?
- How does the author create tension in the novel? How are we given the impression that time may be running out for the girls?
- Predict what is going to happen next in the novel.

Students read Chapter 9- Epilogue (pp. 239-315) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapter 9 – Epilogue (pp. 239-315)

- Who does Gemma do the painting for? Why does she want to give him a gift? Describe what happens to Gemma when she does her artwork.
- Why does Bree worry about her sister sometimes? Is she supportive of her sister's artwork? Why/why not? Try and explain Bree's attitude.
- How does Liam react when he sees Gemma's artwork? Why does his reaction surprise Gemma?

- Describe what happens when the train stops at Barton. Where does Gemma think that she has seen the aborigine woman before? Why doesn't she believe that it is simply coincidence that the same person is chasing their train?
- What startling news does Liam give Bree and Gemma about the aborigine woman? Why is she after the girls? How does Liam manage to hide the girls from the policewoman?
- Where do the girls plan to go after they get off the train in Adelaide? What problems might they encounter?
- Where does Liam get Gemma to hide? Why is it such an uncomfortable hiding place? How does Gemma manage to get off the train without getting caught?
- Why doesn't Ms Devereux notice Gemma and Liam when she goes past them in the police car?
- Where do Gemma and Bree dump the counterfeit money?
- Describe Liam's flat. What do the girls do there? Why is Liam in such a hurry to get moving?
- How does Gemma know that she is getting a migraine? Why is it such a bad time for her to get a headache? What are the side effects of her medication?
- What does Gemma realise when she wakes up? How do the group plan to celebrate?
- What happens when Gemma gets to the ticket counter? Who is with Ms Devereux when she confronts Gemma? How does his presence comfort the girls? In what ways were the girls' naïve?
- How did Ms Devereux trace the girls' father?
- Where are the girls taken? What does Gemma tell the police during her interview? What has happened to Joe? Why aren't the girls going to be sentenced for their crime?
- Why does Gemma feel so much better after she speaks to her mother?
- What does Bree ask her father about Gemma's artwork? Why does this make her so emotional? What does Gemma's artwork reveal to her father about how she feels? What plea does Bree make to her father on Gemma's behalf?
- How long is the girls' father going to stay? When is he coming back? What is he going to help Bree do in Australia? What does Gemma believe is Bree's real motivation for wanting to return to Australia?
- How is Gemma's 15th birthday different from her 14th?

Discussion

- Describe Liam. Why does Gemma's initial impression of him change once she gets to know him? In what ways does he help the girls? What does this suggest about his character? What does Liam stand to lose by becoming involved in the girls' problems?
- How does each girl feel when they realise that Ms Devereux is actually after them? Why do they make the decision to hide from the police? What would you have done in their position?

- Gemma believes that “everyone is answerable for what they do”. How do you think the girls can make restitution for what they have done?
- What amazing insight does Bree have into her sister’s artwork at the end of the novel? Why does her emotional plea to her father seem so out of character? In what ways does it suggest to the reader that there is more to Bree than meets the eye?
- How do you think Gemma’s relationship with her father will change after her trip to Australia and her union with him?
- In what ways will the girls’ adventure together change their relationship?

Activities

Plot – Identify 15 important events that occur in the novel and complete a plot graph for them. List the 15 events in the order that they occur on the horizontal axis. Label the vertical axis “Level of Excitement”. Plot each event on the graph according to how exciting it is. Remember to label the climax clearly.

Writing – It is one year later and Bree is living in Australia and Liam is her boyfriend. Imagine you are Bree. Write a letter to Gemma explaining what is going on in your life, what theatrical college is like and how your relationship with Liam is going.

Police Report – Imagine that you are Ms Devereux. Complete a report about how you chased the girls across Australia and finally managed to track them down in Melbourne.

Character – Complete a character report for a main character in the story. Include information about their attributes, important decisions that they make and how they develop and change as the story develops. Include 5 important quotes from the novel that back up your ideas.

News report – You are a television news reporter. Write and present a story about Bree and Gemma’s adventure across Australia with the counterfeit money.

Drama – Choose an exciting event that occurs in the novel and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast list and stage directions. Practise your scene and present it to the class.

Letter – You are an advice columnist. Imagine that Gemma has written to you asking for advice on how to deal with her parents’ divorce and the fact that her long buried memories are resurfacing. Write a reply letter offering her some solutions to her problems.

Theme – Design a static image that depicts an important theme from the story. You may wish to design a collage that uses words and images from the text, make a poster or use the computer.

Board game – Design a board game based on the novel. For every positive event that occurs reward the player. For every negative one, penalise the player. Decorate the board with images and scenes from the story.

Writing – Explain how the novel would have been different if a certain event occurred.