

Teacher's Notes



RUN

Written by Sarah Armstrong

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Middle grade readers (ages 9–14, grades 5–7)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - AC9E5LA08
 - AC9E5LE03
 - AC9E6LA06
 - AC9E6LE05
 - AC9E7LE02
 - AC9E7LE03

THEMES

- Survival
- Family
- Rewilding
- Friendship
- Forgiveness
- Trust

SYNOPSIS

Cas lives with his aunt Mel because his dad is no good. He loves living with Mel, though, in the same apartment block as his best friend, Rosa, and Mr Galliano, who makes the best pesto in the world. So when Mel tells Cas that she wants him to visit his dad – and maybe even move back in with him – Cas is terrified by the thought of losing all the things that make him feel happy and safe. One thing's for sure: he has to avoid seeing his dad.

In a moment, everything changes. On the way to his dad's, Cas spots his opportunity to escape and jumps out of the car, running away into the forest. But he is quickly lost, and has no idea how to survive or how to get home (or even if he has a home to go to).

In the forest, he meets two sisters, Pearl and Viv. They tell Cas they're walking to Sydney, and that they'll help him get back to the road, but soon it becomes clear Pearl and Viv aren't just walking through the forest – they're living in it. And when a landslide blocks the only way to the road, Cas is forced to trust them with his life, even when he discovers they're on the run ... for reasons that are bigger than he could have ever imagined.

Run explores complex themes of survival, trust and family loyalty in the high-stakes setting of the wild.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Armstrong is an award-winning journalist and the author of several novels for adults and children, including the Miles Franklin-shortlisted *Salt Rain*. Her novels for children include a CBCA Notable Book, *Big Magic*, and its sequel, *Magic Awry*. Her third middle-grade novel is titled *Run*. Sarah lives with her partner and daughter in the NSW town of Mullumbimby.

THEMES

'Bad Dads'

Dads are significant in *Run*. Cas runs away to avoid seeing his 'bad dad', who doesn't compare well to Rosa's dad, or even (later) Pearl and Viv's dad. But his journey through the forest – and his ultimate reunion with his dad – make him see things in a new light. How are each of the dads listed below presented in the narrative?

- Mel's dad (Cas's grandfather)
- Rosa's dad
- Viv & Pearl's dad (compare how Cas sees him to how Pearl describes him on p113)
- Cas's own dad

Compare these dads. What do they make you think about the idea of 'good' and 'bad' dads?

Stealing

Pearl and her family have to steal occasionally to get by, but Cas thinks it's wrong.

Pearl tells Cas that 'sometimes it's OK to break the law' (p157). Do you agree? In which circumstances is it OK or not OK? Does it depend on which law is being broken?

Mack tells Cas 'sometimes you have to do the wrong thing for the right reason' (p208). Do you agree? Or is Cas right – is all stealing wrong?

WRITING STYLE

Cas's journey is high-stakes and full of adventure, so it requires a writing style that makes use of **action**, **suspense** and **conflict**.

In your own words, write a definition for each of these terms – action, suspense, conflict. Why do you think they're necessary in an adventure story? What other genres make use of this style of writing? What genres **wouldn't** use this style of writing? Why?



We might find action in specific language choices (e.g. 'thudding', 'spitting', 'running') or in the plot (e.g. Cas running away). Both instances describe something happening, and this makes the writing feel immediate and alive.

Suspense makes us want more as readers, forcing us to turn the page to get answers to our questions, or to discover what happens after a cliffhanger.

And conflict raises the stakes – our characters all want things, but sometimes these ambitions clash, and the conflict creates tension for the reader.

Find an example of each in the novel and write a short reflection that summarises how you felt while reading each scene/paragraph that you've chosen.

COMPREHENSION

- What makes Cas decide to run away? Do you agree with his decision? Why/why not?
- How would you describe the relationship between Cas and Mel? Does your opinion change over the course of the story?
- What makes Cas's dad a 'bad dad' (p9)?
- How does Cas feel when he thinks about Mel adopting him?
- What are some of the survival skills Cas uses while he's in the forest?
- What are your first impressions of Pearl and Viv? Why are they so wary of Cas when they first meet him?
- What does Cas think when he first meets Mack? What happens to change this perspective?
- What reasons do Pearl, Viv and Mack give Cas for living in the middle of the forest? Do you believe them? Why/why not?
- What is 'rewilding'?
- Why isn't Cas able to get back to the road? Why does Mack stop him from waving down the helicopter? Why doesn't he trust Cas not to tell anyone where they are?
- Cas is afraid of snakes and water that he can't see the bottom of. What else do you think he's afraid of? Which fears are based on things he can see, and which ones are based on things he can't see?
- What memories does Cas recall when he's standing on the edge of the cliff, trying not to fall?
- What is a 'tell'? What are Viv and Pearl's tells?
- Why was Mack framed?
- Cas accuses Mel of mixing her story up with his (p165). Is he right? Does this invalidate what she's telling him about his dad?
- What does Mel say to Cas that makes him feel as if he has no home to go back to?



- Did Cas make a mistake when he used the farmhouse phone to call Rosa? Is he wrong to not tell Viv and Mack what he's done?
- Why do you think Mack decides to give himself up?
- What does Cas notice about the way he looks when he sees himself in the hospital mirror?
- Mack says that 'we *always* belong to nature' (p233). What do you think he means by this?

WRITING EXERCISE

- We follow Cas's journey through the story, but there are plenty of characters having their own adventure as they try to find him. Write a scene that takes place immediately after Cas's disappearance. Use the point of view (POV) of one of the following characters – Rosa, Mel, Kimberley, Cas's dad.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Draw a map of the locations mentioned in the story, and mark where each of the key events takes place.
- Using the descriptions from the book, draw a picture of Viv or Pearl. Which three words would you choose to describe them? What do you think they want more than anything else?
- What is the effect of the prologue on the way you read chapter 1? Why do you think the author has structured the story this way?
Write a scene in which a character is running away from something or someone. Now go back 24 hours and map out how they get to the scene you've just written.
- As Cas is looking for food, he thinks 'everything he's ever learnt about being in the world, about staying alive, is useless here' (p40). What skills **would** be useful? Make a list, then choose one and design a clear how-to poster or card that someone could use if they needed to survive in the wild. (This activity can be done individually or in groups).
- What do you think Pearl and Viv are thinking when they say goodbye (p169)? Write a short paragraph of internal monologue that imagines what they might be thinking in this moment.

RELATED READING

The Explorer By Katherine Rundell

Hatchet By Gary Paulsen

Two Wolves By Tristan Bancks

Across the Risen Sea By Bren MacDibble

