

# SIX SUMMERS OF TASH AND LEOPOLD



DANIELLE BINKS

**TEACHERS RESOURCES**



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Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

'Nobody knows they're in the past until they're out of it – that what they're experiencing is going to be history one day, a moment to try to document and remember.' (p 228)

Alytash and Leopold – Tash and Leo – are neighbours who used to be best friends, but aren't anymore, for reasons that Leo doesn't entirely understand. But now it's the last week of Year Six and Tash is standing in Leo's front yard with a misdelivered letter – and a favour to ask.

It's a request that will set off a chain of events in their little crescent in Noble Park, a suburb that is changing, and fast.

As they solve an unfolding neighbourhood mystery and help Ms Shepparson, a reclusive neighbour with a tragic past, Tash and Leo each have to confront fault lines in their own recent histories and families.

They will discover that friendships can grow and change, that bravery takes many forms, and that, most of all – whatever the future holds – friends and family are what matter.

*Six Summers of Tash and Leopold* is for fans of classics such as Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* and recent Australian works such as Jane Godwin's *A Walk in the Dark* and Nova Weetman's *The Secrets We Keep*, as well as Danielle Binks' previous bestseller, *The Year the Maps Changed* – and for anyone who enjoys a big, hopeful, coming-of-age middle-grade book that features complicated families and life-changing summers.

## BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

Examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?

After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?

After you have read the novel, read about Danielle Binks in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (HASS, and English Language & Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

### HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

#### HISTORY

**Key Quote:** 'People get 'history' and 'the past' mixed up all the time. They think they're the same thing but that's not right, not even a little bit. 'The past' is an earlier time that's already happened and can never be changed. History is just our attempts to understand it. Did you ever wonder why 'history' and 'story' are so close? It's because they come from the same place. That's all history can ever be: a bunch of people's stories strung together to try to figure out what happened and who they were.' (pp 2–3)

**Discussion Point:** Leopold's letter to Tash opens the novel and in it he says that he wishes to tell their history. This quote indicates that history is subjective. Can we ever discover the truth about

history? How can we verify any facts when conflicting views are presented about them?

*Discussion Point:* The uncertainties of history are demonstrated in the following three quotes:

‘Did you know that people found dinosaur fossils long before humans even knew that dinosaurs existed?’ (p 196)

‘I bumped Tash’s shoulder. ‘You don’t know what you don’t know, until you go looking for it, and you can’t blame yourself for not having all the information at the time. When you know better, you do better.’ (p 197)

‘It’s easy for historians – they look at the past like rewinding a movie, able to skip backwards and forwards seamlessly so that all the events line up and make sense, dominoes falling in place along the timeline. Uncertainty doesn’t factor in once the story’s been written, and it’s easy to forget the people in the middle of all that history, who never knew whether or not things would work out in the end.’ (p 281)

Discuss the implications for historians in these quotes.

*Discussion Point:* Michael Shepperson’s letter (pp 275–276) gives his mother a memory of him as he was just before he died. What objects would you place in a time capsule to summarise the significant aspects of your life and times? What message would you write to the people who open the capsule twenty or fifty years in the future? [See **Further Activities** below.]

## MEMORY & TIME

*Key Quote:* By then I’d gone back to leaning over the railing, looking down at the parched pavement of the spillway below and thinking how memories are a lot like the waterways of Mile Creek . . . one connects and runs into another, that triggers more and suddenly you’ve got a flood of them. The memories of me and Alytash overflowed and filled my mind in much the same way; an endless feeling of it happening a long time ago, and in no time at all.’ (pp 22–23)

*Discussion Point:* ‘But what happens when there’s no one left to remember you?’ (p 261) After we die, do we exist as other people’s memories?

*Discussion Point:* The novel questions the way that we measure time via seasons and posits that time might be better measured as First Nations cultures observe seasons: ‘Dear Tash, Time doesn’t make much sense to me anymore. You told me once that your baba would say: *the days are long, but the years are short*. I feel that now. For instance, did you know there’s more than one way to mark the seasons changing? Summer, autumn, winter and spring never did make much sense to me. Years are never so tidy.’ (p 1) Discuss this suggestion.

*Discussion Point:* Memories are personal, and communities have memories as well: ‘Mx Chambers also said that libraries are the keepers of a community’s memories, a place to store the past, which gave me good goosebumps.’ (p 27) How else do communities honour their memories?

## FRIENDSHIP

*Key Quote:* ‘Maybe that’s why the friendship thing they’d said stuck in my mind for a long time after that, even when I’d tried to push it away. Maybe because it had also reminded me of a Polish saying that my mum and Aleks repeated a lot, because it’s one that their parents – my *dziadkowie*, grandparents – used to say to them. They both died when I was little, but the saying at least continued: *Z kim się zadajesz, takim się stajesz*. Which means ‘You become who you



befriend'. (p 38)

*Discussion Point:* 'It's harder when you're a kid because your friends are helping you figure out who you really are, and the kind of person you want to be,' he said, 'but the older you get, you find that the good friends – the very *best* friends – are the ones that you can fall right back into conversation with after not seeing them for a while, because it's like no time has passed, and you just kind of click back into place.'(p 42 ) Discuss this in relation to your own friendships.

*Discussion Point:* 'Leo!' But she was smiling too. 'You've been helping me. And I've been realising that there's parts of her that I've missed, and you're one of them – our friendship, I mean.' I walked slowly towards Tash, who was really hopping now trying to keep warm. 'I feel more like myself when I'm with you. I guess because it's the two parts of me – *before* and *after* coming back together?' (p 225) Is Leo and Tash's friendship stronger because they've gone through pain together and apart?

*Discussion Point:* Leo worries that Rami may become a friend who disappears from his life. Do we sometimes grow away from friends?

## FAMILIES

*Key Quote:* 'And the rest, as my parents say – is history. Except it isn't. History usually means something is finished, over – The End. All neatly wrapped up and completed, but that wasn't my parents' story. I wanted their history to be ongoing, and this weird chapter in our lives – us here, Dad there, and all the reasons why – to be just another footnote in the story of us. The history of our family.' (pp 33–34)

*Discussion Point:* Is any family's story 'neatly wrapped up and completed'? Do we all have obstacles to our progress, and problems to overcome as families?

## COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE

*Key Quote:* 'Lots of kids made pacts with their friends to not ride the slide until Year Six graduation, so it could be a proper rite-of-passage and ceremony marking this important new stage in our lives.' (p 68)

*Discussion Point:* Leopold is in his final week of Year Six and the end of primary school. Not only is he due to start secondary school but he will be going to a private college and will be leaving his best and only friend Rami and his former friend Tash. 'We'd all been in Year Seven for 15 days but I felt exactly the same as I did last year in primary school, while they seemed older, bigger and braver. Like they'd levelled-up in a game that I was still in the opening sequence of, waiting to begin.'

(p 102) What does this quote reveal about growing up?

*Discussion Point:* By the end of the novel how has Leopold changed? Has Tash changed as well?

*Discussion Point:* One of the impediments to kids learning to be independent is the pre-conceived notion adults often have about children's rights as individuals: '. . . we'd stayed low and away from crowded places – because we'd both discovered that some adults seem to enjoy jumping to conclusions and making assumptions when they see kids out and about, living their lives during a school day. Some adults live to call the police on "wagging" kids, it turns out.'

(p 278) Should adults have more respect for kids, in general?

[See **Genre** below.]

## SOCIAL INEQUITY

*Key Quote:* ‘And that became like a mantra in my mind – a repeated saying I turned over and over to try and understand it better. I could really *be* something. If I went to Como and wore a Windsor-knot tie, had a personal laptop and played summer and winter sports every year. And didn’t have panic attacks over Dad not being here. I could really *be* something? Even though I could never figure out the ‘something [...]’ (p 90)

*Discussion Point:* Leo’s family struggles to make ends meet. His mother works full time; his father has taken a job in WA in an effort to recover from gambling addiction and to pay back their debtors. His mother’s failed university studies earlier in life have made her determined that Leo will be given the opportunities she feels that she missed. But does attending a private school guarantee such opportunities?

*Discussion Point:* Leo’s family live in a rental area where people struggle to meet the cost of living. This is a current issue in Australia. How do these families confront such problems? What coping strategies do they demonstrate?

## ILLNESS

*Key Quote:* ‘She had leukemia when we were in Grade Four. It was really bad and she was gone from school for most of the year – but she beat it. Or got better, or *whatever* you call it, and then she came back in Grade Five.’

What I didn’t say was that when she came back, she stopped speaking to me. Just . . . completely ignored me. Acted like we’d never been friends, and moved on to Fatemah, Manh and Thomas instead.’ (pp 48-49)

*Discussion Point:* Tash expresses the feelings of sick kids who just want to return to normality rather than being treated with kid gloves: ‘Well, it feels like that – like I’m on those too-hard chairs, waiting for bad news outside the principal’s office.’ Alytash sighed, and I could picture the very chairs she meant at the MCPS reception area. ‘And I didn’t want to do it again – be the sick kid everyone feels bad for – the idea of starting high school only to get yanked out halfway through term again.’ (p 150) Sensitively discuss this in relation to any experiences students have had with sickness.

*Discussion Point:* ‘When I got out, when it looked like I was going to be okay – I came home and I wanted everything to be *after*. I wanted to wipe everything that was *before* away and that meant you too. I just wanted to start again, and be *me* without all the . . .’ ‘History?’ She breathed out a ‘Yes.’ (p 225) Discuss Tash’s desire to wipe out her past, and whether that is really possible.

## URBAN DECLINE, DEVELOPMENT & GENTRIFICATION

*Key Quote:* ‘The ghosting of this street happened slowly and then in a rush a couple years ago after the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. My dad said people were down to the stumps on their luck and a company came along and started buying up all the houses. Landlords kicked tenants out who’d lived on Brooke Crescent for almost as long as we had to make room for flashy new apartments, and there was even talk of a fancy supermarket and gym coming.’ (p 15)

*Discussion Point:* Developers such as Carver & Coby use corrupt methods in order to convince people to leave their rentals and to influence local councils to do their bidding. Uncle Aleks points this out to Leopold: ‘That’s rich of them,’ he said. ‘Making out like this is a win for the little guy.’ I asked what he meant. He waved a hand at the TV. ‘All this lot have to do is promise to build one low-income or social-housing dwelling and suddenly it’s an “initiative”.’ He made bunny-ear air quotes and then went on. ‘Never mind all the low-income and community-housing



projects they pulled down so as to build only one in amongst fancy townhouses that'll sell in the seven-figures!' 'Are they allowed to do that?' Aleks rose from his seat. 'They don't call it a *scheme* for nothing, lew.' (p 243) What evidence of such corruption was revealed in this novel?

## LIBRARIES

*Key Quote:* 'Mum is always going on about how the library isn't just for books; people bring their babies for story-time, students study because there's free WiFi and quiet, patrons who are functionally illiterate, or maybe don't read or speak English as a first language rely on librarians to help them understand emails and letters they receive – especially complicated ones from the government – and lots of people who maybe don't have anyone else, go to the library just to connect; to get out of the house and be amongst the community. Mum quotes this guy she's studied at university, about why this work is so important. His name is Professor R. David Lankes and he said, 'Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities'.' (p 63)

*Discussion Point:* Leopold and Rami love their school library and librarian Mx Chambers. It is a haven from the sometimes threatening school yard and a treasure trove for kids who love reading and research. So he is shocked to discover that expensive private school Como College doesn't have a dedicated librarian at all. What library services have been offered in the schools you have attended? How important are they, in your opinion?

## ANXIETY

*Key Quote:* 'I know what your mum and the school are saying, but some things can't be hurried and you're allowed to be slow in figuring it out . . . okay?' My chest felt strange, hearing Aleks say that. The opposite of feeling like stones were piling up on top of me – instead it reminded me of that day under the train tracks with Tash, when we'd yelled at the top of our lungs until we were breathless. How good it had felt, to let something out – that loose feeling of space opening up inside of me.' (p 172)

*Discussion Point:* Leopold is amazed to discover that his own mother suffered anxiety as he does: 'She was too hard on herself, and [her] parents had such high expectations of her – so it all came crashing down when her anxiety sent her spiralling.' (p 279) How often is anxiety caused not by external pressures but by how we deal with our self-expectations and judgements on ourselves?

*Discussion Point:* Ms Shepparson confesses to Leo that she is agoraphobic (p 189). How might one learn to cope with such an illness?

## SCHOOL REFUSAL

*Key Quote:* 'There's lots of stuff that adults expect kids to put up and deal with, when we ourselves would refuse to be in those situations. School being one of them. If adults don't like a work environment, or a social situation that's making them uncomfortable or they're finding too stressful – they can just up and leave. Kids don't really get that luxury.' (p 217)

*Discussion Point:* How should parents and teachers deal with school refusal when a child or student isn't coping with traditional schooling or with a particular school? How do Leo and Tash's family deal with the issue?

## ADDICTION

*Key Quote:* ‘Have you ever heard of Gamblers Anonymous?’ I said I hadn’t, and Dad started explaining. ‘Well, it’s a lot of talking therapy and sharing – telling strangers your story, what you’re struggling with, or how you’re coping. Letting them listen to you and maybe share their perspective on what you’re going through . . . and then it’s a lot of listening back, hearing about people who are successfully keeping straight and knowing that it can be done. Or else how they struggled and relapsed and went back to gambling; how they’re not alone in that experience of failure either.’ (p 154)

*Discussion Point:* Leo’s dad is working hard to overcome addiction but it’s not an easy ‘fix’. For his family it is also a test of endurance as they are separated from him and fearful that he may relapse or not come home at all. What does this novel reveal about addiction? Do you think Leo’s dad’s strategy is effective?

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

Study the writing style employed in this narrative, and examine the following sub-topics:

### NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

*Discussion Point:* This novel is written in first person, past tense, except for the letter from Leopold to Tash at the beginning, which is in present tense. How might this novel have differed had it been told by Tash?

### GENRE

*Discussion Point:* This novel is an example of a rite of passage or coming of age novel. Typically, such works are written in first person and describe a period of separation (or alienation from the familiar), followed by a transition via a series of turning points in a person’s life, leading to maturation and self-knowledge, enabling the person to integrate with others again. What tropes of this genre did you observe in this novel?

*Discussion Point:* Read other rite of passage novels and compare to this one. [See **Bibliography.**]

### LITERARY DEVICES

*Activity:* Find examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below to identify examples.

<b>Simile</b>	‘So for two of us the idea of going to school feels like a solar eclipse, or being poured into cement . . .’ (p 156)  ‘townhouses had sprung up like mushrooms after rain’ (p 246)
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<b>Metaphors</b>	'not drown in debt' (p 246)
<b>Personification</b>	
<b>Symbolism</b>	<p>'But it's like you said with those dinosaur bones . . .'</p> <p>'Fossils.' <i>'Whatever!'</i> Tash said, and her breath came out in a puff. 'The before me was still there, just buried deep and I guess I've slowly been digging her up again . . .'</p> <p>'Excavating.' (p 225)</p>
<b>Latin Expressions</b>	<p>'Dare I ask why you're having a day off from school to return to your alma mater?' That sounded like Latin, only because it reminded me of Como College – and when they looked at my face, Chambers explained, 'Translated it means "nourishing mother" which is a very ambitious phrase, used to declare a school that a person formerly attended or graduated from.'</p> <p>(p 269)</p>

<p><b>Popular cultural film, music of literary references, often to fairy tales</b></p>	<p>Two quotes at the beginning of the novel. (p vii)</p> <p><i>'A witch lives across the bridge'</i>. (p 8)</p> <p><i>Miles Morales</i>, a Spider-Man graphic novel. (p 26)</p> <p>'On her left shoulder and tumbling down to her forearm were Australian native flowers like golden wattle, gumnuts, a big red waratah; amongst the flora was a ribbon of words in red ink that read <i>a wilderness of books</i>, which is something this guy called Henry David Thoreau once wrote.' (p 30)</p> <p>'Mum has Joan Jett hair: a shaggy kind of mullet that was like a singer from a band she liked called The Runaways.' (p 30)</p> <p>'As A.A. Milne once wrote, 'You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you.' (p 37)</p> <p>'Today they wore a dark green blazer paired with a white tee that had a green frog on the front, for some band called Silverchair. On Teacher Tuesday they'd nodded approvingly at my mum's Divinyls t-shirt I had worn in honour of them and less approvingly at Rami's very oversized Savage Garden t-shirt, which he'd borrowed from one of his aunties.' (pp 37–8)</p> <p>'Lion is the more obvious nickname for a boy name Leopold – Leo – but it was a running joke between my mum and uncle that one called me lion, the other mouse. Mum said it reminded her of an Aesop's Fable: the one about the lion who spares a mouse, and then when the lion has a thorn in its paw and can't walk, the mouse comes along and returns the favour. The mouse being small enough to pull the thorn from between the lion's toes and save him.' (p 40)</p> <p>'She was standing right in front of us, looking down at Rami's scattering of comics on the table, and my open copy of <i>Young Dark Emu</i>.' (p 44)</p> <p>'I got to hang out between the stacks reading a Tristan Bancks thriller book' (p 140)</p>
<p><b>Other</b></p>	



## HUMOUR

*Activity:* Identify techniques by which humour is created in this novel.

## STRUCTURE

The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention and to shape the work:

a) The story begins and ends with Leo's letter which introduces the story and which he presents to Tash at the end of the novel. Small climaxes punctuate the narrative, for example, Tash's appearance at Leo's gate after several years of estrangement (p 5), Leo's panic attack on the final day of primary school (pp 74–75), Leo's first day at Como College (p 92), the fire at Ms Shepparson's home (p 229), the accident on the footbridge (p 288), Leo's dad coming home (p 291). Make a chart detailing the timeline of the key incidents in the novel.

b) *Strong beginnings and endings to chapters* are one way of structuring a narrative, for example: Beginning: 'So, you got a dog?' was the first thing Dad said when he rang the next evening,' (Chapter 40, p 254)

Ending: 'No, nothing is history just yet.' (Chapter 3, p 34)

Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

c) *Suspense* is the key to any narrative's structure. Several aspects of this narrative were suspenseful, for example, when Leo realised that the threatening man blocking the road near Ms Shepparson's home knew his name. What other suspenseful moments were there in the novel?

## SETTING

*Discussion Point:* 'There are lots of things about where Alytash and I live that don't make a lot of sense. Like how our suburb is called Noble Park. It's named after Alfred Nobel, who founded the Nobel Peace Prize and invented dynamite – two things which seem contradictory (two opposite ends), but history tells us is true. And in any case, the naming was in honour of the dynamite, not the prize – because a local businessman tested explosives in the area and cleared enough red gum trees and flattened the land so that people could come along and build houses on it, and so they did. But somewhere along the way from naming to now, people forgot or either didn't care that it was a suburb named after the Swedish inventor of dynamite, so the spelling switched to 'Noble' – and probably in the hopes that some of that nobility (kings and queens) would rub off.' (p 11) What is Leo trying to tell the reader about his suburb in this convoluted description of its origins?

*Discussion Point:* The description of the Springvale Cemetery is very vivid (pp 260–3) What devices are employed to create such a strong impression of setting for the reader?

## CHARACTERS

**Major Characters:** Leopold Zajak (narrator) ('Myszko – mish-ko – which means mouse in Polish' (p 18); Tash (Alytash) Simons; Paulina, Leopold's mother; Rami Perez, Leopold's school friend; Leopold's Uncle Aleks.

**Minor Characters:** Tash's dad (baba); Tess, Tash's mother; Jakub, Leo's dad; Ms Shepparson at no. 7; Mx Chambers, school librarian; Tash's friends Fatimah Rajab, Thomas Grant, Manh

Nguyen, Belen; Ms Kandhari; Leopold's paternal grandparents, babcia and dziadek; Mr Murphy, a tutor to oversee the Scholarship program at Como College; MCSH students Mariam, Tobias, Jay, Aminat and Sonia.

*Discussion Point:* Read this quote: 'She was outside mine, standing in the middle of the footpath on her skateboard, one leg on the ground while the other moved gently back and forth on the deck, idling. I stared at her through the diamond mesh of our flyscreen door. She was wearing a pink fluoro T-shirt and an armful of bangles in all different colours. Her helmet was plain white with stickers of manga and anime characters I didn't recognise.' (p 5) What does this description tell you about Tash Simons?

*Activity:* Draw up a character chart and find key quotes which give a clear picture of any of these characters, and isolate events that demonstrate their natures. Then write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.

*Discussion Point:* Which character was most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about? For example, Mx Chambers, the school librarian at Mile Creek Primary School, plays a significant role in this novel.

## RESEARCH

*Discussion Point:* Read this quote:

'Primary sources are firsthand accounts and evidence: people who were really there experiencing events, who wrote everything down, took photographs or made art, collected data, that sort of thing. But secondary sources are just information passed on from somewhere else, or someone else – kind of like 'the telephone game' where messages are whispered from person to person until you get to the last one in a long line and compare the first message to the final one heard. Secondary sources can get distorted after being passed along, so they're not as good and reliable.' (p 244)

Discuss Leo's statement in relation to your own research for various subjects. How do you research a topic? Do you seek reference books for the facts, or google search for information, or do you peruse primary sources such as diaries, letters and posters? How do you assess whether the facts presented are true? Does consulting primary sources help with that assessment?

*Discussion Point:* Read this quote:

'Ephemeral materials are the hardest for historians to acquire precisely because they're meant to be fleeting. But ironically, they can be the most valuable, and what gives us the best glimpse into the past of everyday lives and people.' They banged their stamp down and reached for another book. 'Plenty of possessions and documents exist that belonged to royalty, nobility, the rich and powerful – their lives were always going to be documented endlessly and precisely – but it's dangerous to only see history through the lens of a small minority of influential people, and forget that far more existed whose lives were not so rigorously remembered, but better reflected the realities of the times.' (pp 50–51)

Discuss the importance of 'ephemera' in research. How important is it to discover the stories of 'ordinary' people via oral history and other techniques, in order to gain a fuller picture of any historical time?

## WRITING TASKS

*Activity:* Write a poem as if written by Tash about her fears.

*Activity:* Write a letter as if written by Leo to his grandparents in WA.

*Activity:* Write a diary entry as if written by Rami about his falling out with Leo.

*Activity:* Write a book review of this novel.

*Activity:* The Carver & Coby pamphlet for the new development is described: 'I inspected the slick tri-fold pamphlet that was also inside; *Brooke Crescent, New Beginnings* it read in fancy script.' (p 165) A list of 'amenities' is also included. Invite students to create their own brochure of a new development using their suburb as the location.

## VISUAL LITERACY

*Activity:* Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

*Activity:* Design a new cover for this book.

*Activity:* Draw a map of the suburb of Noble Park from the descriptions contained in this novel. Locate Brooke Crescent and the three houses of Tash, Leopold and Ms Shepparson on that map.

*Activity:* Create a book trailer for this novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

## FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'I think it's a pretty good test of a friendship, being apart for a while and coming back together again, seeing if it makes you feel more or less like yourself.' (p 42)

2. 'If I didn't have him, I didn't have anyone to write a letter to . . . which got me thinking that maybe some friends are meant to be ephemeral too – lasting for only a very short time. It had been that way with me and Alytash; maybe it would be for me and Rami.' (p 54)

3. 'When I told mum all of this, she'd been furious – especially when she'd dug through their old online school News updates and realised that; around the time their last librarian retired and was never replaced, they'd found money to build a sixth oval – probably using what they'd saved *not* hiring a new dedicated teacher-librarian. But Mum had tried to brush it aside as one small fault in an otherwise faultless school. I don't think she believed her own lie though. I know I didn't. A school without a librarian was like a sizzle without the sausage, or Gotham without Batman. It just didn't make sense.' (p 96)

4. 'They're being kind of intense about it, and I feel like I'm eight again,' she said. She unclicked then pulled her helmet off and started scratching at one of the stickers with her fingernail. 'I love them and I know they're scared, and it feels like we're all just holding our breath but I also feel a little bit like they're squeezing me too tight, y'know?' (p 147)

5. 'Maybe it's worth thinking about?' he suggested, gently, 'Figuring out how you feel before letting other people's preferences decide for you.' (p 171)

6. 'Because while it's also true that adults are more easily and readily able to remove themselves from situations they don't like, there's also plenty of times in life when resilience is needed and you just have to show up or stay put, whether you like it or not. If only to prove to yourself that you can do it, or for the sake of people you care about.' (pp 218–219)



7. 'Just . . . the way that time kinda stood still for her; how she left everything preserved like in a museum?' I shifted uncomfortably and said I didn't know. 'I think it is. I think that's what my parents would do too.' Then she held my stare and said, 'Maybe it's a good thing it all burnt the way it did.' 'Tash! Don't say that!' She curled in on herself a little more. 'What? Maybe it is! I wouldn't want my parents to be stuck in time like that. I wouldn't want them to just get in this loop of missing me so they couldn't even leave their own house . . .' She swiped angrily at her cheeks, and seemed surprised they were wet.' (p 248)

8. 'Yeah, I think so – what's that old saying . . . ?' he started. '*History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes,*' Mum cut in, adding, 'Mark Twain said that.' I looked from the phone to Mum and back again, amazed that even with so much distance between them, my parents could be so in sync as to snap and pull the string tight between them again. I told Dad I loved him, and we hung up. But I kept thinking about patterns – how people could break them, only if they knew what to look for.' (p 256)

9. 'It's not fair that when you die, you're just this collection of facts, and nobody can ever really know you again,' Tash said suddenly' (p 263).

10. 'I didn't understand her not wanting me to be around – until Dad said that he could sympathise. 'It's hard to let the people you love most see you at your lowest,' he told me one evening. Mum had reached a hand out and squeezed his, which he then lifted and brought to his lips for a kiss, which made her blush and smile.' (p 302)

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Compare this novel to others that deal with anxiety. Read non-fiction texts on the subject as well. [See **Bibliography**.]

2. **Design a poster to advertise this book.**

3. The **title of this book** refers to six summers shared by Tash and Leopold. Which summers do you think this title refers to? What other title might the book have had?

4. **Debate any of the topics** covered in these notes, or suggested by the novel.

5. **Locate, watch and discuss** some of the classic films referred to in this novel. Listen to some of the music that various characters in the novel enjoy.

6. **Write a one-page letter** describing a day in your life, which could be placed in a class time capsule, like the time capsule created in the novel.

## CONCLUSION

*Six Summers of Tash and Leopold* is a wise, big-hearted novel about finding your place in the world. Leo is a sensitive boy who loves study but doesn't fit in at the new school he is sent to. He is missing his dad who has gone away to deal with his gambling addiction and is still hurting after the defection of his best friend Tash when she suddenly enters his life again. His more recent best friend Rami, meanwhile decides to join another friendship group and Leopold can barely hold things together and refuses to attend school. He feels lost and totally alone with no place that feels safe anymore. It is only through friends and family that he finds his way home again.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Danielle Binks** is a writer, literary agent, and lecturer in Creative Writing at RMIT University who lives on the Mornington Peninsula. Her previous books were *Begin, End, Begin: A #LoveOzYA Anthology*, which won the 2018 ABIA Book of the Year for Older Children; the bestselling middle-grade novel *The Year the Maps Changed*, which was a CBCA Notable Book for Younger Readers 2021, shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards 2021 and shortlisted for the Readings Children's Book Prize 2021; and the young-adult novel *The Monster of Her Age*, which won the 2022 Indie Young Adult Book of the Year. Find Danielle at: [daniellebinks.com](http://daniellebinks.com)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.