

These notes are for:

- Secondary
- Years 9 - 12
- 13+ years

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- History

Example of:

- Print Text
- Science Fiction
- Young Adult Fiction

Experience of:

- Manipulation and control
- Power and oppression
- Prejudice and slavery
- Love and loyalty
- Terrorism
- Identity
- Moral ambiguity
- Feminism
- Information saturation

Values addressed:

- Freedom
- Equality
- Tolerance
- Respect

Suggested resources:

- Multiple copies for class study of *The Knife of Never Letting Go*
- Internet access
- Writing journal

WHAT THE CARNEGIE AWARD JUDGES SAID:

'A bleak and unflinching novel with fascinating characters and extraordinary dialogue which creates a fully-realised world that the reader really buys into. The dog Manchee is an inspired creation! Ness conveys a real sense of terror and the ending is devastating. A novel that really stands out.'

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Walker Books.

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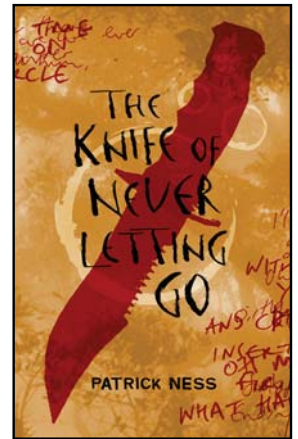
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 www.walkerbooks.com.au
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The Knife of Never Letting Go - Overview

The Knife of Never Letting Go Book 1, Chaos Walking Trilogy

by **PATRICK NESS**

The Knife of Never Letting Go
 Chaos Walking Book 1 (pbk)
 ISBN: 9781406326314
 ARRP: \$24.95
 NZRRP: \$27.99
 No. of Pages: 496
 October 2009



Outline:

Imagine you're the only boy in a town of men. And you can hear everything they think. And they can hear everything you think. Imagine you don't fit in with their plans... Todd Hewitt is just one month away from the birthday that will make him a man. But Prentisstown has been keeping secrets from him. Secrets that are going to force him to run. When Todd discovers a place of complete quiet in the swamp, away from the Noise, his life becomes endangered. He finds a girl there, Viola, a member of a scouting party for new settlers. Both have to escape the Mayor of Prentisstown and his men. Todd and Viola flee aiming for the town of Haven, but when they arrive it is not what they expected.

Patrick Ness has created a tough and unsentimental novel whose strong themes of power and prejudice are delivered at a breakneck pace by original and compelling characters. This challenging and deeply rewarding novel will effortlessly engage 14+ readers.

Awards for *The Knife of Never Letting Go*: Winner – Guardian Children's Fiction Prize 2008, Winner – Booktrust Teenage Prize 2008, Shortlisted – Carnegie Medal 2009.

Author Information:

Patrick Ness was born in 1971 on an army base called Fort Belvoir, near Alexandria, Virginia, in the United States. He studied English Literature at the University of Southern California and worked as a corporate writer at a cable company in Los Angeles. He moved to London in 1999 and taught Creative Writing at Oxford University for three years. He has published two books for adults, *The Crash of Hennington* and a short story collection called *Topics About Which I Know Nothing*. He writes 1000 words a day, *The Knife of Never Letting Go* was 112,900 words long and took about seven months to get to first draft.

Notes prepared by Deb McPherson:

Deb McPherson has taught English in NSW secondary schools for twenty-eight years. She worked as part of the committee for selecting texts for the Higher School Certificate for over fifteen years. She was the Senior Curriculum Officer, English, at the Board of Studies from 2001-2002 when she worked on the development of the 2002 English Years 7-10 Syllabus. She was the Manager of English for the NSW Department of Education and Training from 2003-2006. She is the author of four anthologies of Australian non fiction and has co-authored a collection of recommended texts for the 7-12 English classroom and a HSC English guide.

How to use these notes:

To appeal to a broader curriculum, these teachers' notes have been categorised into the areas Viewing, Reading & Writing, and Listening & Speaking. Particular themes of interest have also been explored. These activities may appeal to a broad age range but are aimed at years 9 - 12. Recommended websites within these notes may not have content that is age appropriate. Please use at your own discretion.



Before reading the *The Knife of Never Letting Go*:

- **COMING OF AGE: THE GLOBAL EXPERIENCE**

The Knife of Never Letting Go is set in a possible future world in which a boy is expected to go through a ritual when becoming a man. Using the internet and the library, research the different coming of age rituals for boys and girls in different societies. You could consider the Polynesian societies of the Pacific, modern Australian expectations, Aboriginal society, Inuit or Native American societies. Such research will give you a context for the very different ritual which was to surround Todd's coming of age birthday in Prentisstown. Wikipedia is a good place to start:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coming_of_age
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rite_of_passage

- **AUTHOR RESEARCH**

Visit Patrick Ness' website – <http://www.patrickness.com/> – research the author, his works and his background. Create a PowerPoint presentation on what you know about Patrick Ness.

Viewing questions for *The Knife of Never Letting Go*:

- **VISUALISATION & REPRESENTATION**

Symbols can represent important ideas and beliefs in a society. They can represent people too. For example a crown can represent a queen or king or the flying kangaroo could represent aspects of Australian society. What symbols would you design to represent the society of New Prentisstown to the rest of the New World and to the new settlers who are on their way? What symbols would you choose to represent Todd and Viola and the Spackle? Write a short paragraph to explain your choice of symbol and justify its design with reference to the text.

- **STORYBOARD THE CHASE SEQUENCES**

Reading *The Knife of Never Letting Go* leaves you breathless – Todd and Viola seem to be running across the whole world. A storyboard is a series of panels of rough sketches outlining the scene sequence and major changes of action or plot in a film. You can use this technique with a novel as well. In a storyboard capture the different chase sequences in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and highlight a key incident in each of them, for example the rescue by Wilf or Manchee's attack on Aaron.

- **ARTWORK**

Visualising the setting of a novel is an important aspect of understanding a novel. Develop a storyboard that highlights the main settings of the novel. You could start with Prentisstown and then add the swamp and the other areas through which Todd and Viola travel. Caption each frame with a few brief words explaining its importance in the plot.

- **USE OF GRAPHICS**

On pages 20-22, the Noise and the effect it has on the listener, is represented through Todd. Handwritten words swirl across the page doubling over and under other words. There are crossings out and different fonts with upper and lower case in a crowded and overwhelming page. With a partner discuss how effective this representation is and together plan another representation of the Noise, only this time make it from visual images rather than words.

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Reading & Writing questions for *The Knife of Never Letting Go*:

- **QUOTATION**

Patrick Ness places a quotation from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* at the start of the novel.

'If we had a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.'

Ness wants us to experience and understand the terrible invasion that the Noise represents, the 'roar' that Eliot speaks of – that awful feeling of never being alone and assaulted by the sounds and thoughts of others. We all seek company and friends but also appreciate the opportunity to reflect in solitude, to keep our thoughts private. Such privacy is not available to Todd and the other men until a cure is found. Keep a diary in which you consider the thoughts and feelings you are happy to share and those you consider private and not for publication. This activity is of course not for sharing!

- **ONLINE READING**

Visit:

<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/show/feature/Home/New-World-intro>

Read *The New World: A story of Chaos Walking*, a prequel to *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, which Ness has posted on the Booktrust site. This prequel tells the story of Viola's journey to the New World and the tragedy that occurs when her parents attempt to land. Viola's birthday gift will prove vital to her survival. Read the short story (15 pages long) and write a response explaining the insight the story gives you into Viola's character and her actions in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*.

- **DESIGNING YOUR OWN COMING OF AGE RITUAL**

The nature of Todd's coming of age ceremony is hinted at during the novel but the details still come as a shock. In sharp contrast to the ideas of Mayor Prentiss, what would you consider appropriate to signify that you had become an adult? Suggestions could include some days spent in solitude or isolation in the natural environment or a test of strength or self endurance. You could consider a public ceremony to acknowledge your new status or an object that signifies that status. Whatever you decide write a description that captures the essence of your own ceremony.

- **MAGAZINE ARTICLE**

Imagine you had the opportunity to interview Todd and Viola just before the Spackle came into view. What questions would you ask them about their experiences? Suggest answers that would be in character and reflect your knowledge of the text. Craft your responses into a feature article and decide on an appropriate headline.

- **JOURNAL ENTRY: INFORMATION OVERLOAD**

Imagine every day – at school, at home, when you go out – you were subjected to endless chatter, a constant stream of words and music that you did not select, that you could not avoid and intruded into your every waking moment. How would that affect your ability to think clearly, to act logically, to communicate openly? This is Todd's experience – the Noise dominates his life. He must try to filter out other's thoughts while trying to prevent his own most private thoughts being broadcast to every one. In a journal entry try to capture Todd's emotions and feelings about this cerebral overload and write a passage that is a plea from his heart for respite. Then create a counter text, a text that celebrates the joys of solitude and silence and having time to reflect.

For another example of information saturation read M.T. Anderson's *Feed*, a science fiction novel in which computers deliver advertisements, censored news, chatter and 'malfunctions' (technological drug experiences) directly into the characters' brain and have done so since birth. This savage satire on corporate ethics and media manipulation is compulsive reading.

- **CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

Viola has survived a crash that killed both her parents. She is young, alone and with few resources in a new and violent land. Yet Viola shows great strength of character and resourcefulness. She wins the respect and love of Todd. Remember we only see Viola through his eyes. Write a character assessment of Viola, using evidence from the text to support your conclusions.

Listening & Speaking questions for *The Knife of Never Letting Go*:• **FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE**

Todd tells his own story in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and his strong voice and singular vision affect our reading of the text as we see all events and characters through his eyes. This perspective can be unreliable as we only have Todd's account to go by. How would you classify Todd's account? Painfully honest? Unreliable?

In a small group decide on your opinion of Todd based on your reading of the text. Once you have gathered your evidence report your findings to the rest of the class.

• **WHOSE VALUES?**

Texts can challenge or reflect the values of the society they describe. Prentisstown values are in conflict with the nine values for Australian schools identified by the Federal Government, you can view these at:

http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_nine_values_for_australian_schooling,14515.html

After reading *The Knife of Never Letting Go* you will appreciate that Prentisstown values are very different to those respected in Australian schools. With a partner select two of the values and construct a Prentisstown equivalent drawing on the text for examples of how this value operates. For example Care and Compassion vs get what you can. Be prepared to explain your comparisons to the class.

• **SPECULATION / PREDICTION**

If we ask ourselves what would have "happened if?" at different periods in the novel we can end up with quite different perceptions of the characters

- What would have happened if Todd had killed Aaron?
- What would have happened if Todd could read?
- What would have happened if Ben had gone with them?

Think of some other "what ifs?" and then select one you want to consider with a partner. Talk about your ideas with that partner and then write a description of the different path the novel and characters could have taken. Also consider what will happen next? What do you predict will happen to Todd and Viola in the second book of *Chaos Walking* called *The Ask and the Answer*? Will they be able to escape from the Mayor? Will they defeat him? Read the results of your speculation and prediction out to the class and display them for later comparison when *The Ask and the Answer* has been read.

• **MASS DEBATE – WHERE DO YOU STAND?**

Consider the following proposition 'Todd would be better off joining the Mayor'. Imagine a line has been drawn through the classroom and you have to position yourself along it in line with your opinion on this proposition. Do you agree with it 100%? Do you disagree with it 100%? Are you fifty/fifty or somewhere else along the line? This task will involve a detailed analysis of Todd's character. Discuss Todd and this proposition with other students in a small group. Find evidence from the novel to support your stand then move into position along the line. Everyone in the class will be called on to support where they are standing by referring to the novel. If you hear a really good argument you are allowed to change your current position but you must still justify your new one.

• **LIGHTENING THE TENSION – USING HUMOUR**

Reading *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is an intense experience. The pace of the novel, tense encounters and narrative chase sequences can leave the reader breathless. If you have studied Shakespeare's *Macbeth* you will know how the playwright uses humour in the porter's scene to lesson the tension after Duncan's murder. Todd's talking dog, Manchee, initially provides some comic relief however he soon becomes a significant character in his own right and his death is gut wrenching for both Todd and the reader. Relive those examples of humour that lesson the tension in the novel and share your analysis of them with a partner.

• **EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The thirty articles of the Declaration can be found at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> The Mayor and the other men of Prentisstown trammel on human rights, particularly the rights of women. They deny to others many of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In small groups consider the thirty articles in the Declaration and judge the Mayor and his men against them. Report your findings to the class.

Belonging questions for *The Knife of Never Letting Go*:

Todd doesn't belong in Prentisstown and the men of Prentisstown are outcasts from the rest of the society of New World but they are bound together by powerful ties. Viola and the other new settlers are on their way to join a community but the settlements on New World have changed dramatically since the Spackle war. *The Knife of Never Letting Go* could be a powerful supplementary text in the area of study 'Belonging' for the NSW HSC Standard and Advanced English courses. Maslow (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs) describes belonging as a basic human need but we can work to exclude people just as much as to include them. Not belonging is a powerful theme in this novel. With a partner take each community described in the novel and using the table supplied work out its context, inclusions and exclusions. One has been done for you.

Community	Context	Includes	Excludes
Prentisstown	Male only community whose thoughts are known to all; controlling Mayor	Men who have killed others	Women, Spackles, those who don't conform
Farbranch			
Brockley Falls			
Carbonel Downs			
Haven			

Ideas for the library:

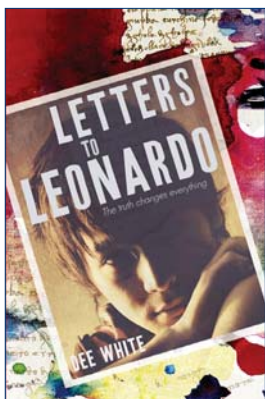
- COMING-OF-AGE: THE NOVEL EXPERIENCE

A coming-of-age story or novel concerns a character undergoing adventures and/or inner turmoil in his/her growth and development as a human being. Some characters confront war and racism, others deal with violence and cruelty, death and family dysfunction. Some novels are set in contemporary times, others have speculative or historical settings. Some coming-of-age novels are listed below. Visit your library and choose one to read so you can compare and contrast it with the story of Todd as he struggles into manhood.

Related texts:

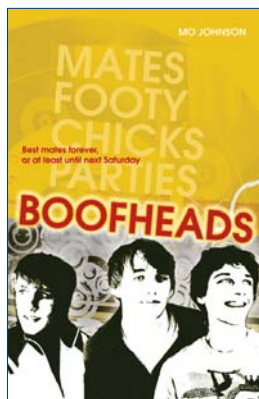
- Bronte, Charlotte *Jane Eyre*
- Dickens, Charles *Great Expectations*
- Franklin, Miles *My Brilliant Career*
- Panshin, Alex *Rite of Passage*
- Plath, Sylvia *The Bell Jar*
- Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*
- Twain, Mark *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- Winton, Tim *Breath*

Further coming-of-age novels from Walker Books



Letters to Leonardo (pbk)
by Dee White
ISBN: 9781921150883
ARRP: \$16.95
NZRRP: \$18.99
No. of Pages: 256
July 2009
*Teachers' Resources available
*Premier's Reading Challenge List
NSW Booklist 7-9

A powerful, unique and sometimes confronting coming-of-age story told in an engaging and realistic manner. Dee White's voice will engage students and help to raise discussions on important issues while encouraging self-expression and the exploration of identity.



Boofheads (pbk)
by Mo Johnson
ISBN: 9781921150678
ARRP: \$18.95
NZRRP: \$19.99
No. of Pages: 272
Sept 2008
*Belonging "Recommended Titles" HSC list
*CBCA Notbale Book 2009
Older Readers

From Mo Johnson, the author of **Boofheads**: "There are so many excellent books available about friendship from a female perspective. **Boofheads** is my attempt to do the same for boys and the English teacher in me wanted to write a book that teenage male readers would finish."



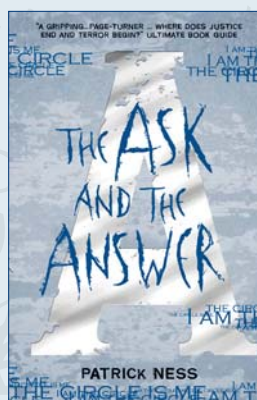
Skim (Graphic Novel) (pbk)
by Mariko & Jillian Tamaki
ISBN: 9781406321364
ARRP: \$24.95
NZRRP: \$29.99
No. of Pages: 144
April 2009
*Graphic Novel Kit available
*Shortlisted for the 2009 Silver Inky Awards

This moving, coming-of-age graphic novel addresses issues of sexuality, race and culture set within the tumultuous world of high school. In witty, moving and painfully honest diary entries *Skim* confides the frenzy of grief that surrounds her, while deep down she struggles with her own loneliness and falling in love for the first time.

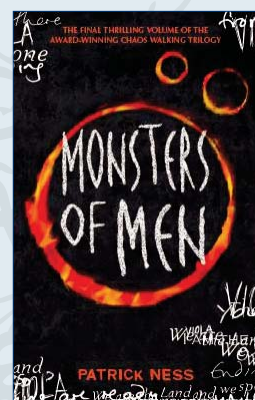
Read them all!



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Chaos Walking Book 1 (pbk)
ISBN: 9781406326314
ARRP: \$24.95
NZRRP: \$27.99
No. of Pages: 496
October 2009



The Ask and the Answer
Chaos Walking Book 2 (pbk)
ISBN: 9781406327496
ARRP: \$24.95
NZRRP: \$27.99
No. of Pages: 536
December 2009



Monsters of Men
Chaos Walking Book 3 (hbk)
ISBN: 9781406328233
ARRP: \$32.95
NZRRP: \$34.99
No. of Pages: TBC
May 2010