



**RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA
READING GUIDES**

Ghost Boy by Felicity Pulman

Random House Australia, published June 2004

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Reading Level: for independent readers 8+

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COVER BLURB

Froggy dreams of drowning. Just as his nightmare is coming true, he is saved by a mysterious ghost boy, Tad. But is Tad telling him the truth? And why can Froggy now see back to the past, to 1881, when Sydney was gripped by a smallpox outbreak and the Quarantine Station was full of the stench of death?

With Cassie's help, Tad and Froggy realise they must trust each other to solve the secrets of the past. If Froggy can find what has been lost for more than one hundred years, maybe he and Tad can both be set free.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Tad must cross time and space to tell the secrets of the past . . .

Froggy dreams of drowning. Just as his nightmare is coming true, on a fateful day when school bullies chase him over a seaside cliff, he is saved by a ghost boy, Tad Dearborne.

Tad has been wandering the cliffs of Dobroyd Point since 1881, and his story is one of great suffering. Left alone with his baby brother, Joseph, after small pox and disease ravage his family, Tad fled from detention at the Quarantine Station in Manly. His mission: to hide the family treasure in a beach

cave. The waves ultimately took Tad's life, leaving him to ponder his baby brother's fate for eternity.

But Froggy is his only hope and with the help of the cool and popular Cassie, they delve into the mystery of Tad's past. Sneaking into the Quarantine station archives at night reveals a shared lineage between the two boys, more closely evidenced by the discovery of a family photograph of great-great-grandfather Joseph. The revelation also proves that there is an heir to the Dearborne estate, an estate on the verge of being claimed by the Crown. When Froggy retraces Tad's tragic swim and finds the family treasure, both boys are set free.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Felicity Pulman grew up in a small bush town in Rhodesia, Africa, which is now called Zimbabwe. She had no TV, video or computers for entertainment, but she loved reading. Books, she says, were her windows to the world: 'When I ran out of books I wrote my own – in exercise books stolen from the school stationery cupboard!'

Felicity has always loved writing stories but never took it seriously until, age 40, she did a mature-age HSC and then went on to do a communications degree at UTS, majoring in creative writing and social and political studies. This was followed by an MA in children's literature from Macquarie University.

An early success with *Three's a Crowd* (Pan Macmillan Dolly Fiction series, 1992) was followed by *Ghost Boy* (Scholastic, 1995) and then *Wally the Water Dragon* (Blake Education, 2000), *Surfing the Future* (Wendy Pye NZ, 2001) and *Shalott* (Random House Australia, 2001).

Shalott won the biennial Society of Women Writers Award in the YA category in 2001. *Return to Shalott* and *Shalott: The Final Journey* followed in 2002 and 2003, along with two novels from the *Guinevere Jones* television series in 2002. This new version of *Ghost Boy* was published by Random House Australia in 2004.

Felicity's latest books are the Janna Mysteries, a medieval mystery series for teenagers, which include *Rosemary for Remembrance*, *Rue for Repentance* and *Lilies for Love*.

Felicity is lucky enough to live near the beach and bush, so when she's not either writing or 'cooking up' stories, she enjoys swimming, surfing and snorkelling, bush walking and bush regeneration.

Felicity is available for talks and workshops with schools and groups. You can contact Felicity through her website at: www.felicitypulman.com.au

THEMES

- Australian history
- Ghosts
- Quarantine and the treatment of disease
- Bullying
- Courage
- Friendship
- Identity
- Early immigration
- Racism

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Tad's father snatches him away from England to start a new life in Australia. How do you think Tad would have felt on arrival? What do you think the differences between the two countries might have been?
- What ways did the doctors try to treat small pox that seem strange, even funny, to us now? Look for other treatments for different illnesses that are different today.
- Discuss the ways in which the Quarantine system was unfair. Why are the Chinese blamed for the small pox epidemic? How do you feel about Dr Clune's treatment of the epidemic?
- Similarly, what are some of the surprising differences between life in 1881 and the present?
- Think of a time you journeyed to a strange place: was it different from what you expected and how did you feel when you arrived?
- Why is Tad immediately distrustful of Cassie? How do our beliefs and habits reflect the way we see things?
- How does Froggy and Cassie's relationship change over the course of the book? What is the author saying about popularity?
- What research techniques and resources do Froggy and Cassie use to create a family tree? Research your own family tree. If your family originally immigrated to Australia, where are they from? If your family is indigenous to Australia, what part of the country are they from?
- Froggy and Cassie wag school and break into the Quarantine Station. Does the knowledge they gain justify their methods?
- In chapter 12, what do you think of Froggy's rough treatment of Tad when he asks about the ghost's past? Why are they both so angry?
- Is Froggy brave for risking his life for the family treasure? What does he expect to find? Discuss the different meanings 'treasure' can have.
- What do you think happened to Tad at the end of the book? How do you think he feels?
- In chapter 15, Froggy's mother describes their research into the family's past as 'a question of identity ... The question of where you came from and where you belong.' Discuss the theme of identity (personal, familial, cultural) and how it develops throughout the book.
- Froggy had to confront many of his fears and rise above them. How has Froggy's experience with Cassie and Tad changed him as a person and how will his life be different at home, school, etc? Write about a time that you had to confront a fear and how it changed the way you handle difficult situations.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to research and draw a family tree – either their own, or a make-believe wish list! There is an example of a family tree at the end of the novel.
- Research some of the early 'killer diseases' and their cures. Visit a quarantine station in your state, if you can. (For example, there are two quarantine stations in WA, in Perth and in Albany, which are similar in design to the Sydney Quarantine Station described in *Ghost Boy*.)
- Pick a scene from the novel and write a short play based on the characters and situation. Choose a cast and act it out.
- *Ghost Boy* has been published twice with two different covers. The first version featured a drowning boy. Ask students to design a cover for the novel.
- Write a ghost story! (Who is the ghost, what does it look like, why has it come back, and what does it want you to do?)
- Research the life of someone interesting who has lived in the past. Write a story about him/her. Why did they come to Australia, what work did they do, how and where did they live, how did they dress, what makes them interesting, etc.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Did you know that your school can do a special *Ghost Boy* tour (based on the book) at the Quarantine Station in Sydney? As Felicity says: 'Having the tour available is a great way to help the book "come alive", to encourage reluctant readers especially, but also to give students access to a genuinely historic, genuinely creepy and absolutely fabulous location!'

Phone 1300 886 875 for details and bookings.

For further information about the Quarantine Station and available tours, go to: <http://www.q-station.com.au/>

Visit www.randomhouse.com.au/readingguides for information on other Random House Australia books for teenagers and young adults. A Reading Guide is also available for Felicity Pulman's *Janna Mysteries* series.