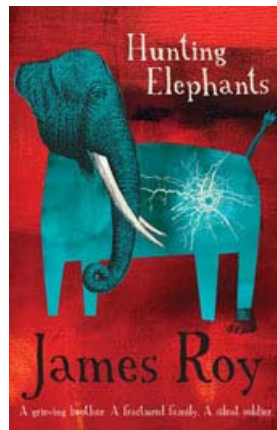


# HUNTING ELEPHANTS

James Roy



## Teaching Support Kit

by

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HUNTING ELEPHANTS  
Teaching Support Kit

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# HUNTING ELEPHANTS

## Teaching Support Kit

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

### Plot summary

After a near-death experience while exploring an underwater cave on school camp, fourteen-year-old Harry is forced to attend a wedding in the country with his family. Not only is the wedding the fourth for his Great-uncle Frank, a 'prickly' Vietnam vet, the wedding happens to be on the same weekend as his best friend's birthday party – at a go-karting track.

Harry pleads with his parents to stay home with no success; since his younger brother Joel died, his mother has been very strict about family and family events. Harry feels responsible for his brother's death and on top of this has to deal with his parents constantly snapping at each other.

Once they reach Uncle Frank's, Harry meets his second cousin, Trent. Trent is also 'prickly'; he loves guns, shooting and death-metal bands. Harry initially dislikes him – until he ignores what others say and actually spends some time getting to know his cousin.

Harry is extremely curious about Uncle Frank's war adventures and in particular, the secretive, locked caravan Frank escapes to. Uncle Frank is heralded by the town as a war hero for his daring encounters as a tunnel rat. Over the weekend, Harry learns more and more about his uncle. After being caught snooping through the caravan, Harry discovers that not all the rumours about Frank's time in Vietnam are true.

During the wedding reception, a flash flood hits and the guests are horrified to discover that one of the children has been trapped in a drain – which is quickly filling with water. In a desperate effort to save the boy, the guests grab Frank and Harry's father encourages Frank to rescue the boy, just like he would have as a tunnel rat in Vietnam. Frank refuses and Harry, feeling guilty after snooping through the caravan, offers to go in Frank's place. He rescues the boy, much to the disgust of his mother, who is fearful of losing her only remaining son.

Harry tells his parents of his discussions with Frank after snooping through the caravan and reveals that Frank was actually a mechanic in the war; it was merely assumptions that led people to believe he was a tunnel rat. Harry's family are also able to clear the air over Joel; they all learn that you should never rely on assumptions.

## GENRE, STRUCTURE AND STYLE

*Hunting Elephants* is a third-person narrative about fourteen-year-old Harry, who is reluctantly attending his great uncle's fourth wedding in the country.

We discover that Harry's younger brother, Joel, died as a result of cystic fibrosis. The reader is privy to Harry's memories of the events leading up to Joel's death through flashbacks, triggered by ordinary events and sensations.

The characters are very realistic. The novel centres on Harry, his mother Sandy and father David, who are dealing with the grief of having lost a son/brother and respond exactly as you would expect a family in crisis. Harry is suffering guilt and blames himself for Joel's death. The novel does have a male protagonist, however, the drama of a family in grief will appeal just as strongly to teenage girls.

The novel has dramatic elements, for example, when we are sharing Harry's flashbacks about his mother, but also includes comical elements and mystery surrounding both Uncle Frank and his war experiences and the circumstances of Joel's death. The Vietnam War is also referenced, so the novel also provides the reader with snippets of historical information, possibly sparking the reader's interest to find out more.

The novel is set in New South Wales, Australia. Some Australian colloquial language is used, and while this can be appreciated by Australian readers the overall story has universal appeal.

# PRE-READING NOTES AND ACTIVITIES

## About the author

James Roy was born in Trundle, western New South Wales in 1968, and spent much of his early life living on mission compounds in Papua New Guinea and Fiji. He enjoyed adventuring by day and reading by night. Then one day, tired of reading books by dead people, he decided to start writing his own. James's first novel for young adults, *Almost Wednesday*, was released in 1996. His second book, *Full Moon Racing*, was commended for the 2000 IBBY Ena Noel Award and earned a Notable Book listing in the 1999 CBCA Book of the Year Awards. Among his many other works, his middle-grade novel *Captain Mack* and its prequel *Billy Mack's War* were both CBCA Honour Books, as was *A Boat for Bridget*. His popular non-fiction title *The 'S' Word – A boys' guide to sex, puberty and growing up* is used widely in middle-school, and has been sold into the UK, Irish and French markets. His most recent books are *Problem Child* and *Queasy Rider*. He won the 2008 NSW Premier's Literary Award for the critically acclaimed *Town*. A much sought-after presenter, James visits thousands of students across Australia and South-East Asia each year, talking enthusiastically about the writing life, and helping young people discover their own talents for creative writing. He lives in the Blue Mountains with his wife and two daughters, and his interests include music, sport and bushwalking.

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## Overview of the Vietnam War

### *The build-up to war*

The Vietnam War (which also involved Laos and Cambodia as battlegrounds) ran from 1959 until 1975. The war was fought between the communist North Vietnam (supported by both its communist allies and South Vietnamese insurgents known as the Vietcong) and South Vietnam (supported by the United States and others including Australia).

The Vietcong, lightly-armed South Vietnamese communist rebels, fought a largely guerrilla-style war as allies to the North Vietnamese. By contrast to the guerrilla tactics of the Vietcong, the North Vietnamese Army engaged in a more conventional war, on many occasions committing large units to battle. To combat the Vietcong guerrillas, American and allied forces along with South Vietnamese forces relied heavily upon air superiority and overwhelming firepower to conduct search-and-destroy operations, involving ground forces, artillery and air strikes.

At its simplest, the United States entered the war to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam as part of a wider Cold War-era anti-communist strategy known as 'containment'.

Historically, Vietnam was a French colonial territory, but at the conclusion of what is usually referred to as the first Indochina War, a 1954 event known as the Geneva Conference made a provisional division of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel, with control of the North given to the Viet Minh as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, and the South becoming the State of Vietnam under

Emperor Bảo Đại. A year later, Bảo Đại was deposed by his prime minister, Ngô Đình Diệm, creating the Republic of Vietnam.

### ***America becomes involved***

The US military advisory effort in Vietnam began during the First Indochina War – as early as September 1950 – when the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam, was established in Saigon. Its mission was to supervise the issuance and employment of \$10 million worth of military equipment to support French legionnaires in their effort to combat Viet Minh forces. By 1953 the amount of US military aid had jumped to over \$350 million and was used to replace the badly worn World War II vintage equipment that France, still suffering economically from the devastation of that war, was still using.

In September 1954, soon after the Geneva Accords were signed on 20 July 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower wrote to the new Prime Minister of the South Vietnam government, Ngo Dinh Diem, promising United States support to ensure a non-communist Vietnam. Following through on that commitment, direct United States aid to South Vietnam began in January 1955, and American advisors began arriving in February to train the South Vietnamese army.

Throughout 1955 the South Vietnamese government actively suppressed a number of religious sects within the country as well as anyone suspected of being a communist sympathiser. Some claims suggest as many as 25,000 people were arrested and 1000 killed during this time. The effect of these actions was to incite the Vietnamese Communists into vicious terrorist activities in the South; assassinating several hundred officials of the Diem government.

In 1957, with the national reunification elections mandated by the Geneva Accords overdue, the South Vietnamese government arrested another 65,000 suspected Communists and killed more than 2000. Repression by the South Vietnamese regime led to the rise of self-defence units in various parts of South Vietnam, units sometimes operating on their own without any Communist party direction and sometimes not, in armed opposition to Diem.

During 1955 and 1956 North Vietnam concentrated on political struggle, still recovering from the war with the French and influenced by the Soviet Union, then in a period of peaceful coexistence with the West under General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev. By 1957 however, spurred by the anti-communist oppression within South Vietnam and observing a potentially revolutionary situation emerging within the country, the North Vietnamese leadership determined that the time had come to resort to violent struggle.

### ***War breaks out and escalates***

Late in 1954, after the Geneva Accords, about 90,000 Viet Minh troops returned to North Vietnam. By 1959, the North Vietnamese government began filtering them back into the South to lead the insurgency. In the initial stages, the Communists organized mass demonstrations along with a few raids on vulnerable South Vietnamese installations, but this was quickly followed by a Communist-led uprising in the lower Mekong Delta and Central Highlands that took control of 'liberated zones', including an area of nearly fifty villages in Quang Ngai Province. The North Vietnamese Communists cleverly organized a shadow government, the National

Liberation Front (NLF), staffed by officials not obviously linked to the Communist North, but dedicated to the defeat of Diem's US backed Saigon government. The NLF took over in the areas of Communist control, levied taxes, trained troops, built defense works, and provided education and medical care.

By 1961 the steady progress of the insurgency was near crisis level.

The new Kennedy administration increased American support for the South Vietnamese regime to prevent a collapse. By December of 1961, 3200 US military personnel were in Vietnam as advisors, supported by \$65 million in military equipment and \$136 million in economic aid. Military assistance was reorganized as the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), formed under the command of General Paul D. Harkins in February 1962. MACV was there to support the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to defend the country. MACV included Army Special Forces (Green Beret) instructors and CIA personnel organizing the Montagnards (a Vietnamese mountain people who had long sought political independence from Vietnam proper). The Montagnards acted virtually as a US-trained and -organised version of the Vietcong, something between a militia and a guerilla army. When North Vietnam eventually occupied the South reprisals against the Montagnards were severe. Many Montagnards continued to fight for years after the war.

By 1963, the number of US military advisors in Vietnam had grown to 16,000 and the Americans were firmly identified with the oppressive South Vietnamese regime. Outrage over the regime in Washington was communicated to South Vietnamese military leaders, indicating US support for a new government. The Kennedy administration, through the CIA and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, encouraged a coup in early November 1963 in which the existing South Vietnamese government leaders Diem and Nhu were assassinated. General Duong Van Minh took over the government and the US was obliged to support him and the series of weak governments that followed.

Later that same month, President Kennedy was himself assassinated in Dallas, TX and President Lyndon Johnson assumed office. Hanoi thought that the new President might be looking to exit Vietnam and calculated that an increase in violence would be the lever to push the US out.

Escalation of the war beginning in December 1963 resulted in some immediate success for the Communists in the South. By March 1964 they controlled over forty percent of the country, a liberated zone from the Central Highlands (in which the Montagnards continued to fight a war of resistance) to the edge of the Mekong Delta, containing half the population. The South Vietnamese rebel forces, now called the 'Viet Cong' – short for 'Viet Nam Cong San', meaning 'Vietnamese Communist' – had grown to 35,000 guerrillas and 80,000 irregulars. They were supplied and augmented by the completion of a land-route through Laos, known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Despite an ARVN force of 300,000 soldiers throughout the country, US aircraft over South Vietnam were fired upon by Chinese and Soviet anti-aircraft artillery, terrorist bombs were exploding in Saigon, and the area controlled by the Viet Cong continued to increase.

By 1964, under massive pressure from the North Vietnamese-supported Viet Cong,

the Diem government of South Vietnam was on the brink of overthrow.

Diem was backed by the United States, but that backing was limited to military and economic aid along with about 16,000 military personnel classified as advisors. To put more pressure on Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnamese government, the US implemented a naval escalation in the form of a series of semi-covert operations against the North. The North Vietnamese government wanted to show it would not bend under this pressure, and perhaps ill-advisedly chose to attack a US destroyer rather than the faster South Vietnamese patrol boats.

On 2 August 1964 one of the US destroyers in the region, the USS Maddox, came under fire in the Gulf of Tonkin from three north Vietnamese torpedo boats, even though outside North Vietnamese territorial waters.

The attack was taken very seriously by the United States and had far-reaching ramifications. Immediately after the incident, President Johnson ordered Seventh Fleet carrier forces to launch retaliatory strikes against North Vietnam. On 7 August the US Congress overwhelmingly passed House Joint Resolution 1145, commonly referred to as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. This resolution authorized, 'the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.' It went on to say, 'the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.' This resolution provided the authority for large-scale US intervention in Vietnam.

In late 1964, President Johnson was involved in a re-election campaign, a factor that limited the escalation of the war. Once Johnson achieved re-election in November, there were sporadic US air strikes and naval action, but absent a focused increase in US direct action the Viet Cong continued attacks on ARVN and US forces.

Viet Cong raids became bolder, believing the South Vietnamese government to be unstable and with no clear sign that the US would increase its involvement. The Communist Viet Cong were on the verge of victory and only a strong response from the US could stop them. Until now, Johnson had hesitated while his advisors grew increasingly convinced that a full military commitment to Vietnam was unavoidable. In the first months of 1965, President Johnson made that decision and ordered the deployment to South Vietnam of major US ground, air, and naval forces, beginning the full-scale phase of the Vietnam War.

### ***Full-scale war***

The full-scale phase of the Vietnam War began in early 1965, a year that started with about 23,000 US servicemen in Vietnam. When considering the US actions at this time, it is important to understand that there was a widespread global feeling that 'communism in Asia was on the move', with many pointing to Indonesian leader Sukarno's departure from the United Nations on 8 January 1965, and alliance with Hanoi, Peking and the local Communists as evidence of a growing threat.

The ground force escalation commenced on 8 March 1965 with the landing of



3,500 Marines of the 9 MEB at Danang, soon reinforced by larger Marine contingents. By the end of 1965 American troop strength reached 184,300 – an increase of almost 600% on the start of the year.

General William Westmoreland took command of MACV in June 1964 with the responsibility for preventing a Viet Cong takeover in the south. General Westmoreland proposed a strategy known as 'Search and Destroy' and this was supported by Defense Secretary McNamara and other important voices in the US government, becoming the unquestioned American policy from June 1965 through 1972.

The lethal combination of airmobile US ground troops with supporting artillery and airpower was devastating against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army at first, but they soon adopted effective counterstrategies. While the US and allied troops consistently won engagements, overall the attrition of war and destruction of South Vietnam's countryside and civilian population inflamed negative public opinion outside Vietnam and worked against the Americans.

During 1966 and 1967 'Search and Destroy' continued with US troops joined by Australians, South Koreans and other allied nations. As allied troop strength increased, the initiative in the war passed to them and NVA/VC victories were few. In 1967, large 'clearing operations' were mounted as both offensive operations and local security operations, finding and destroying enemy troops, their weapons and infrastructure. An estimated 70,000 Communist soldiers were killed in 1966 and as many as 133,000 in 1967 while substantial areas of South Vietnam were deemed 'pacified.' In late 1967 some of the biggest and bloodiest battles of the war took place at Loc Ninh and Dak To (Hill 875), involving heavy casualties for the Communist forces with much smaller US losses.

By the end of 1967, General Westmoreland believed that his 'Search and Destroy' strategy was working. In November 1967, he returned the US to testify before Congress and provide support for the Johnson Administration. Speaking at the National Press Club in Washington, he said, 'With 1968 a new phase is starting . . . we have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view.'

Westmoreland's optimism seemed justified. By the end of 1965, he had achieved a stalemate on the ground. In 1966 about a million Vietnamese civilians were added to those under the protection of the Vietnamese government, a positive trend that continued for most of 1967. US losses were approximately 6,000 dead in 1966 and 11,000 in 1967, about one tenth of the Communist toll. The enemy seemed to be suffering unsustainable losses while the South Vietnam forces grew ever more capable. At the end of 1967, most US forces were directed against Viet Cong guerrillas and local forces, while NVA forces had been defeated or held at bay.

This success led North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap to decide that a change in tactics was necessary. It was decided to deal a knockout blow against the South Vietnam government and its supporters, no matter the cost. Using sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, General Vo Nguyen Giap prepared what became known as the 'Tet Offensive'. General Vo Nguyen Giap and other North Vietnamese leaders firmly believed that the South Vietnamese population was ready to revolt if given the opportunity, and to this end planned a series of major attacks on key South Vietnamese cities which would shift the military and political

advantage heavily towards the North.

As a prelude to the Tet Offensive, on 20 January 1968 nearly 40,000 North Vietnamese troops besieged the US Marine base at Khe Sanh near the demilitarised zone (DMZ). US Marines and Army troops, supported by air bombardment and artillery plus airborne supply, responded to mount a successful seventy-seven-day defense of Khe Sanh, with NVA forces finally broken on 6 April by the Army's 1st Cavalry Division. While Khe Sanh ultimately resulted in the loss of about 10,000 NVA troops, it succeeded in its goal of diverting military attention to the North and thinning out defenses near the South Vietnamese cities.

In late January 1968, Vietnam prepared for the annual Tet (Lunar New Year) celebration. As in prior years, a ceasefire was arranged with Communist forces (the North Vietnam Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong (VC)). Most South Vietnamese Army units (ARVN) were under-strength as soldiers were granted leave to attend family events arranged for Tet, while American and allied units were at low alert, expecting a period of quiet. Combined with the military focus on the Khe Sanh region, the major South Vietnamese cities were as open as they would ever be to an attack.

Early in the morning of 31 January 1968, more than 80,000 NVA and VC erupted from carefully infiltrated positions to attack six major cities, thirty-six provincial capitals and twenty-three airfields and military bases – almost every important location and target in South Vietnam.

Major assaults were conducted on Saigon, Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Quang Tri, Kontum, Ban Me Thout, My Tho, Can Tho, Ban Tre and other places. At ten of these locations, the Communists temporarily wrested control from the ARVN and Americans holding them. In Saigon, where 4,000 Viet Cong guerrillas had infiltrated during Tet festivities, these forces attacked almost simultaneously throughout the city. The previously invulnerable US Embassy in Saigon was overrun and held by Viet Cong for eight hours before US Marines and Military Police could retake the complex. It took another three weeks for US troops to kill or evict most of the VC from Saigon.

The largest battle of Tet, and the whole war, was in Hue, where the city was in enemy hands and under fire from 31 January until an assault regained control on 25 February. Four NVA battalions and six VC battalions took the city and it required the massing of four US Army battalions, three USMC battalions and eleven ARVN battalions, plus supporting air, naval and artillery assets, to retake Hue, with heavy casualties on both sides. While in control of Hue, the Communists executed about 5800 civilians in reprisal for cooperation with the South Vietnamese government and the Americans. Returning ARVN then executed many more as VC collaborators. The house-to-house fighting and destruction of the ancient city by bombardment left over 100,000 homeless.

During the acute period of the Tet Offensive (31 January to 31 March 1968) other large battles took place at the Bien Hoa air base and at the American stronghold of Tan Son Nhut. The Tet Counter-Offensive period continued through 1968 with clearing operations as US units were committed in the populated areas to oppose the enemy units that had penetrated and in the uninhabited areas to block the enemy's withdrawal and to prevent reinforcement of crumbling Communist

forces.

It took until the end of 1968 – almost a full year – for the pre-Tet level of security to be restored.

Enemy losses from allied operations during Tet were estimated to be 45,000 dead with up to 170,000 total casualties, mostly Viet Cong. American deaths were about 1500 plus another 2800 among Allies and ARVN. Tens of thousands of civilians died in the clashes and reprisals, creating bitterness toward the VC and adding to the Communist setback. Tet also failed to spawn a civilian uprising or any substantial increase in support from the South Vietnamese people. In military terms, the Tet Offensive was a disaster for the Communists but politically they came out far ahead with the American public's will to fight severely dented.

General Westmoreland thought that the Communists were almost finished and asked for an increase in troop strength by 206,000 to finish the conflict. The General's optimism was not supported back home, however, with many seeing the Tet Offensive as proof that the Communist forces indeed still strong and were capable of sustaining the war almost indefinitely.

President Johnson decided that rather than grant Westmoreland's requests for more troops (which was against the advice of the new Secretary of State, Clark Clifford, and would have required a politically unacceptable reserve call-up or drawdown in Europe), Johnson recalled Westmoreland to Washington and replaced him with General Creighton Abrams, Westmoreland's deputy commander, in July 1968.

Under General Abrams US policy went into reverse, moving toward a return to the pre-1965 arrangement of US advisors supporting ARVN units who would bear the combat responsibility. Under the new name of 'Vietnamization' the objective was to withdraw Americans from Vietnam and return responsibility for the fighting to the Vietnamese themselves.

Peace talks with the North Vietnamese began in Paris on 13 May 1968, not long after President Johnson's 31 March 1968 speech announcing the intention of the US to withdraw from Vietnam and limit bombing of the North.

With a Presidential election underway, in which Johnson was not running, talks went nowhere while the North Vietnamese waited to see who would become the new President.

The election made politics the master of the war strategy. On 31 October, Johnson announced progress in the peace talks and a bombing halt to boost Humphrey, the Democrat candidate. Republican rival Richard Nixon countered with a claim to have a 'secret plan' to end the war, but provided few details.

Nixon was elected, narrowly, and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger became his chief advisor on the war. Nixon won the election using a slogan of 'Peace with Honor' but in reality it seems he had no secret plan other than Vietnamization and gradual withdrawal.

Following Nixon's election, US combat strategy focused on defensive operations as

a show of good faith in peace negotiations and to appease domestic opponents of the war. As this became clear to military units in the field, morale and combat effectiveness sank. Drug use, insubordination and other problems increased as soldiers realised they were pawns in a diplomatic and political endgame.

In June 1969, Nixon ordered the first actual reduction of troop strength in Vietnam and 25,000 soldiers returned home. More withdrawals followed, timed for maximum political benefit. While major war protests continued in the US, the war was actually winding down. In Paris, the Peace Talks droned on inconclusively for years as the conduct of the war was manipulated to serve political and diplomatic purposes.

Nixon also increased bombing, in secret, and in April 1970 announced the 'Cambodian Incursion', an invasion that outraged war opponents and increased distrust of the President's plans. In response to Nixon's seeming desire to continue military action, on 24 June 1970 the Senate repealed the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. On 22 December 1970 the Cooper-Church amendment to the US defense appropriations bill banned funding for any and all US ground force operations in Cambodia and Laos.

In 1973 (four years after the beginning of America's troop withdrawal from Vietnam) and after the Paris Peace Agreement, Nixon resumed bombing of Cambodia to try to stop Communist advances there. Once again the American anti-war lobby was outraged and on 19 June 1973 the US Congress passed, by a veto-proof vote, the Case-Church Amendment forbidding any further US military involvement in Southeast Asia, effective 15 August 1973.

On 7 November 1973 the War Powers Resolution, limiting a US President's power to wage war, was passed by Congress.

The effect of the anti-war legislation, combined with Nixon's credibility collapse as a result of the Watergate scandal, stripped any Presidential authority to act in Southeast Asia. With Congress in the hands of war opponents who reflected the public mood of the American people, there would be no further intervention to help the anti-Communist governments of South Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia.

In August 1974, exhausted by the cascading Watergate scandal and facing impeachment, President Nixon resigned. His successor Gerald Ford was in no position to challenge the anti-war Congress.

The American bombings of 1972 and 1973 caused a long pause in North Vietnam's operations as they concentrated on rebuilding troop strength, training and logistics. North Vietnam received increased aid from the Soviet Union and were able to repatriate and rearm prisoners of war (POWs) released by the South under the Paris Peace Accords. Over 100,000 troops were sent to infiltrate South Vietnam and heavy weapons were deployed to the South – all actions prohibited by the Accords. Limited battles were fought but no significant change in territory resulted.

By mid-December 1974, the North Vietnamese were ready to recommence their military actions, hopeful that US politics would prevent any strong American intervention but not certain of this position. A small but strong attack was launched against the Phuoc Long province and although this attack obviously

violated the Paris Accords – and despite South Vietnamese President Thieu making desperate pleas to Washington for help – no American response was forthcoming.

The long-predicted final assault on South Vietnam by the NVA occurred in March 1975.

On 21 April 1975 South Vietnamese President Thieu resigned and went into exile, accusing the United States of betrayal. Thieu's successors either resigned and fled like Thieu or tried to offer terms to North Vietnam, offers that were rejected.

As South Vietnam imploded and Communist victory became certain, the American Embassy in Saigon became the focus of chaos. Ambassador Graham Martin resisted overt preparations for fear of causing panic. The result was the loss of critical days for preparation of the evacuation. At the same time, CIA units and others with independent transport got out who they could. Finally, President Gerald Ford ordered Operation Frequent Wind, the evacuation of Saigon, to begin the morning of 29 April. Military Sealift Command (MSC) had prepared for the contingency with ships offshore loaded with food, water, and medicine along with Marine security detachments on board. Some 44,000 people had been flown out by Air Force fixed-wing aircraft from Saigon's Tan San Nhut air base on 21–28 April, but hostile artillery and rocket fire on the 29th closed the runways, leaving helicopter evacuation the only option. Marine CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters from the US Seventh Fleet began airlifting refugees from Saigon to the MSC ships offshore. A contingent of Marines had to be brought in to the embassy grounds to use force to control the flood of South Vietnamese nationals trying to escape. From 29 April until the rescue of the last stragglers a few days later, the MSC ships took on more than 50,000 evacuees.

The last Americans to die on Vietnamese soil were two Marines, killed in a rocket attack while providing security at Tan San Nhut on 29 April. The last two Americans to die in the Vietnam War were lost late on 29 April 1975 when their CH-46 evacuation helicopter crashed at sea near the USS Hancock (CV-19), one of the Navy ships receiving refugees, while making one more trip back to the Vietnam mainland to receive more refugees.

NVA forces entered Saigon on 30 April 1975 to find the capital almost empty. ARVN and South Vietnamese government officials had fled, foreign delegations had gone home.

The last of the remaining American staff was lifted out from the Embassy grounds early in the morning of 30 April and the last members of the Marine security force cleared at 7.46 AM.

A Presidential order, based upon faulty information, prevented the evacuation of 420 refugees who had been assured of safe passage – they were left waiting on the Embassy stairway, including more than a dozen staff members from the South Korean Embassy.

A little after 11 AM on 30 April 1975, a Soviet-built T-54 tank bearing a Viet Cong flag burst through the gates of the Presidential Palace, the vanguard of a force that took over the seat of South Vietnamese government.

Offshore, the MSC ships, the Seventh Fleet contingent, and twenty-six Vietnam Navy ships with 30,000 Vietnamese sailors and their families aboard, set sail for the Philippines. The Vietnam War was over.

### ***The Unwelcome Veterans***

Vietnam was virtually unique in that America, and to a lesser but still significant extent her allies, did not welcome its veterans back as heroes. Vietnam veterans were blamed for the war and its failure. Shamefully, many veterans were personally targeted by opponents of the war and many were verbally abused or even spat upon as they disembarked at the airport. Veterans often refused to wear their uniform in public due to fear of such abuse.

Although statistically Vietnam veterans suffered the negative after-effects of war at rates comparable to the veterans of other wars, the absence of public support is often considered to have heightened these effects on their sufferers. In many countries involved in the Vietnam War, the treatment of veterans is now looked back upon with a great sense of shame.

### ***Famous Photographs***

Find copies of 'Vietnam Napalm' by Nick Ut (referenced on p 36 of *Hunting Elephants*) and 'General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Viet Cong prisoner in Saigon' by Eddie Adams.

Adams won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography and a World Press Photo award for the photograph, but would later lament its notoriety. He wrote in *Time*:

*The general killed the Viet Cong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world. People believe them; but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths.*

*What the photograph didn't say was, 'What would you do if you were the general at that time and place on that hot day, and you caught the so-called bad guy after he blew away one, two or three American people?'*

Adams later apologized in person to General Nguyen and his family for the irreparable damage it did to Loan's honor while he was alive. When Nguyen died, Adams praised him as a 'hero' of a 'just cause'.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie\\_Adams\\_\(photographer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_Adams_(photographer))

## **Pre-reading activities**

- How important is family to you? Have students write an extended response to this question or alternatively hold a class discussion.
- Read to the class the short story 'Are We There Yet?' in *Just Annoying* by Andy Griffiths. It is a humorous anecdote of family car trips.
- Using butcher's paper, have students brainstorm words or images that come into their minds when they think of the following words:
  - Vietnam War
  - Assumptions
  - Grief

- If you prefer, you could complete the activities relating to the Vietnam War prior to reading the novel to 'set the scene'.

# THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

## MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

### Elephants

Elephants are referenced in the title and on pp. 35 and 246. They generally relate to the phrase 'an elephant in the room', referring to two major issues – Joel's death and Frank's experience in Vietnam.

### Science class analogy

On p. 64, Mr Greene talks about how we can't see oxygen, but we assume it is there. He then explains that science is not based on assumptions; it requires evidence. This is an analogy for one of the main themes in the novel – making assumptions.

### Doug

Doug, the scruffy man at the station, is symbolic of making assumptions. He looks scruffy and Harry incorrectly assumes he is a homeless Vietnam vet.

## THEMES

### FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Harry's mother is struggling to come to terms with her son's death. She is desperately trying to keep together her remaining family. In addition to this, things are tense between her and her husband.

#### QUOTES

- 'Because it's family, Harry. And family's important.' (p. 27)
- 'Done,' said Dad, who could be pretty good at not talking about things. (p. 112)
- 'I lost one son, and I would never expect that going to a family wedding might cost me the other.' (p. 322)

### GRIEF

Harry's family is experiencing the grief of having lost a child. His mother is trying to preserve Joel's memory by keeping his room exactly as it was; his father is trying to move on and Harry is trying to make sense of it all as well as blaming himself for Joel's death.

#### QUOTES

- 'You might be ready, David, but I'm not, so if that makes me a bad person . . .' 'Does it make me a bad person that I *am* ready?' (p. 68)
- But Harry hated how that sign reminded him of what happened to Joel. (p. 83)
- She also left him with a screen full of guilty reminders of what he'd done. (p. 86)



## PRECONCEPTIONS/ASSUMPTIONS

The novel is full of assumptions and preconceptions.

- Harry is very quick to shy away from the scruffy man at the station. He initially refuses his offer of showing him a magic trick due to fear of the unknown. Harry assumes he is a homeless Vietnam Vet who is suffering from mental problems.
- Harry assumes he is to blame for his brother's death.
- Harry's mother assumes Harry is angry with her, not suffering from guilt.
- Everyone assumes Frank was a tunnel rat and a war hero.
- Harry initially assumes Trent is not very nice based on what others have said, yet quite likes him in the end.
- Everyone assumes Frank's marriage will not last because it is his fourth marriage.

## QUOTES

- Harry decided it was time to stand up. 'Um . . . no thanks, not really.' (p. 33)
- 'That's right – evidence. Curiosity coupled with evidence leads to facts, and that's what science is all about. Don't assume.' (p. 64)
- It seemed very weird, and even a bit surreal, watching someone in black jeans and a slightly worn death-metal t-shirt skulking around in there, talking to chooks. (p. 197)
- 'Have you ever heard him actually say those words?' (p. 320)
- 'You know, Sandy, everyone else is just as much at fault here. You – we – heard all those Vietnam stories, and let ourselves believe that Frank's experiences were the same as everyone else's. Shows how wrong you can be.' (p. 320)
- 'I just thought you were angry with me, because you left me to look after him.' (p. 327)
- 'Listen, sport, I've told you before, you shouldn't assume anything.' (p. 338)

## VIETNAM WAR

Uncle Frank, one of the novel's characters, is a Vietnam vet. The novel provides some information/references to the Vietnam War.

## QUOTES

- 'Long, badly planned, too many people die, and I suspect that in the finish it may end up being utterly pointless. A bit like the Vietnam War, really.' (p. 34)
- 'Well, he's a war hero,' she said in a reverential tone. (p. 148)

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS

## HARRY

Harry is the novel's teenage protagonist. His younger brother and only sibling, Joel, has died from complications due to his cystic fibrosis. Harry is not only dealing with the grief of losing a brother; he feels responsible for causing Joel's death and also has to watch his family fall apart. His parents are constantly arguing and his mother has practically turned Joel's bedroom into a shrine, despite the fact they could really use the extra room in the house. To make matters worse, Harry is made to miss his best friend's go-karting birthday party. His Great-uncle Frank is getting married for the fourth time; his mother has insisted they go 'as a family', even though Harry has never met Frank before.

## SANDY

Sandy is Harry's mother. She is having a hard time dealing with the death of her youngest son; she is very snappy and keeps Joel's room exactly as it was to try to preserve his memory, not allowing anyone else to go into it. This causes problems with the rest of the family; she is trying to run an eBay business from the too-small lounge room, which is highly inconvenient. The logical solution is to turn Joel's bedroom into an office, but Sandy is not yet ready to take that step. She is desperately clinging to what family she has left and insists they all attend her favourite uncle's wedding, even though her husband and son do not wish to go.

## DAVID

David is Harry's father and has to deal with the grief of losing a son, Joel. His natural response is to try to make jokes to lighten the mood, which causes contention with his wife, Sandy.

## FRANK DUNCAN

Frank is Harry's Great-uncle and a Vietnam vet. He is in his sixties and is about to be married for the fourth time. Frank lives in a small country town and is heralded as a war hero. He is extremely reluctant to discuss his war experiences, and frequently escapes to his caravan for personal time; he refuses to let anyone else in the caravan.

## TRENT

Trent is Harry's second cousin and Frank's grandson. Trent's father has a difficult time and often can't cope raising him, so he is temporarily living with his grandfather. Trent is often moody and loves death metal, rifles and hunting.

## DOUG

Doug is a scruffy, dirty man Harry sees at the train station on his way to school. Initially, Harry is reserved towards the homeless man, but gradually befriends him. Doug teaches Harry not to rely on assumptions, which mirrors one of the novel's main themes.

# HUNTING ELEPHANTS

## Teaching Support Kit

# ACTIVITIES

Below is a list of different post-reading classroom activities you might wish to do.

## English Activities

### Activities on background, setting and structure

#### Activity 1 – *The Vietnam War*

- Refer to BLM 1

#### Activity 2 – *Vietnam horrors*

- Refer to BLM 2
- WARNING – these photos could possibly be distressing for some students; use your professional judgement before using the photographs provided with the task. Alternatively, go to [www.pulitzer.org](http://www.pulitzer.org) and find a less confronting photograph to use instead.

#### Activity 3 – *Family recount*

- Refer to BLM 3
- If you did not use this as a pre-reading activity, you may wish to read to your class the short story 'Are We There Yet?' in *Just Annoying* by Andy Griffiths. It is a humorous anecdote of family car trips.

### Activities on spelling, grammar, etc.

#### Activity 4 – *Mix and match vocabulary*

- Refer to BLM 4
- Students can either cut and paste the correct responses in their workbook or alternatively the BLM can be printed out on card and students can play Vocabulary Concentration (also known as Memory).

#### Activity 5 – *Where are the elephants?*

- Discuss the novel's title; have students Think, Pair and Share (think of an idea, discuss ideas with a partner and then share responses with the class) about why they think the novel is called *Hunting Elephants*. Students can then complete the BLM.
- Refer to BLM 5

## Activities on Plot

### Activity 6 – *Picture log*

- On a sheet of poster paper, have students draw or cut out a picture to represent each of the twenty-three chapters. The idea is that it is a more creative alternative to chapter summaries; students will be able to glance at their picture log and be able to quickly recall what happened in each chapter.

### Activity 7 – *That was then, this is now*

- Refer to BLM 6

## Activities on characters

### Activity 8 – *Character acrostic poems*

- Refer to BLM 7

### Activity 9 – *Conversations between characters*

- Refer to BLM 8

## Activities on themes

### Activity 10 – *When you assume . . .*

- Refer to BLM 9

### Activity 11 – *Read all about it!*

- Refer to BLM 10

### Activity 12 – *Grief*

- Refer to BLM 11

### Activity 13 – *Grief Soundtrack*

- Refer to BLM 12

### Activity 14 – *Cystic Fibrosis Brochure*

- Refer to BLM 13

## Activities on text analysis

### Activity 15 – *Chapter questions*

- Refer to BLM 14

### Activity 16 – *Text response essay questions*

- *Hunting Elephants* shows us how wrong assumptions can be. Discuss.
- *Hunting Elephants* shows us how important it is for families to stick together. Do you agree?
- Discuss the meaning of the title in reference to the novel, *Hunting Elephants*.
- Compare the reactions of Sandy, David and Harry to Joel's death.
- In what ways is Uncle Frank a hero? Discuss.

# Links to other Curriculum Areas

## Whole School or Year Level Projects

### Art

- Study the Pulitzer Prize winners for newspaper journalism; many of these are from the Vietnam War.

### History

- Research the Vietnam War.
- Look at how historians use evidence – this fits in with the notion of assumptions.

### Geography

- Study Vietnam: the culture, food, land features, language, war zones, etc.

### Interdisciplinary/Whole Year Level or School Activities

- Hold an ANZAC Day assembly with slides and information about the wars Australia has been involved in.
- Have a Vietnam veteran come and talk to the students about his or her experiences. (Obviously tread carefully here!!)
- Hold a Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Day and conduct a fundraiser.

HUNTING ELEPHANTS  
Teaching Support Kit

# Student Worksheets



# *Hunting Elephants*

## The Vietnam War

Using resources such as books or the internet, answer the following questions on the Vietnam War:

1. When was the Vietnam War?
2. What was the war about and who was involved?
3. What were the fatalities?
4. Who were the Viet Cong?
5. What were Agent Orange, the Battle of Long Tan and the fall of Saigon?
6. How did the war end?
7. Why were the Vietnam veterans treated so badly by the public upon their return?
8. Any other interesting facts you feel are relevant.

Present your findings in an oral presentation, essay, PowerPoint presentation or poster.

### Grading Criteria:

Criteria	Very High 5	High 4	Med 3	Low 2	Very Low 1
Your understanding of the Vietnam War					
How well your oral presentation, essay, powerpoint or poster conveyed accurate information.					
Your overall preparation and presentation.					

**Total    /15**



## *Hunting Elephants*

# Vietnam horrors

There is a lot more media coverage of the Vietnam War than of World Wars I or II, simply because it was more recent and greater technology was available.

Many journalists won the Pulitzer Prize (a prestigious journalism award) for their photos of Vietnam War horrors.

Two such famous photos are 'Vietnam Napalm' by Nick Ut and 'General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Viet Cong prisoner in Saigon' by Eddie Adams.

Choose one of the photographs (or another Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph relating to the Vietnam War).

Look at the photograph carefully and write a descriptive narrative piece, describing the goings on in the photograph and also explaining what you think is actually going on, for example, how the people came to be in that situation).

### Comments:

### Extra challenge!

Once you have completed your assignment, research the photographs further and find out what really happened when they were taken.

## *Hunting Elephants*

# The trials and tribulations of family holidays

Harry tells us the story of two family holidays – one in Cairns shortly before Joel died and the main plot of the story, a family weekend trip to the country for his Great-uncle Frank's fourth wedding.

Family trips (especially ones in the car!) can be rather frustrating at the time, but often create fond memories. Think of a memorable family trip you have been on. It could be memorable for either good or bad reasons!

Write a recount of this trip. You might wish to mimic the author of *Hunting Elephants* and re-tell the events in a serious way, or you might wish to mimic the style of authors such as Andy Griffiths and tell your tale in a humorous way.

**Total: /30**

Comments:

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Vocabulary mix and match!

Word	Definition
Sump (p. 9)	A product used to make fire-bombs
Malnourished (p. 14)	An extreme fear of confined spaces
Protruding (p. 14)	A protective covering, usually made from canvas
Eclectic (p. 31)	Relating to the study of metals and their properties
Wheedling (p. 42)	Out of control or refusing to conform to rules
Metallurgical (p. 49)	Lacking proper nutrition
Unruly (p. 49)	Gloomily
Coyly (p. 91)	Poked fun at
Sauntered (p. 102)	Imposing unfair restraints or limitations on someone
Reverential (p. 148)	In a shy manner
Vaunted (p. 149)	A flood
Scoffed (p. 149)	A collection or set made up from different sources
Marquee (p. 155)	A large tent or shelter
Tarpaulin (p. 162)	To try and influence someone using flattery
Napalm (p. 162)	A drain or channel, like a sewer
Glumly (p. 211)	Sticking out
Indignantly (p. 212)	Walked in a leisurely manner
Oppressive (p. 219)	Someone or something that is regarded with great respect
Claustrophobic (p. 219)	A pit or well that collects water
Deluge (p. 276)	In a manner which shows strong displeasure at something deemed unworthy
Culvert (p. 295)	Bragged or showed off

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Where are the elephants?

The title 'Hunting Elephants' might be considered a little confusing, given that the novel has nothing to do with actually hunting elephants!

The 'elephants' Harry is hunting refer to the phrase 'an elephant in the room'.

Find out what this phrase means.

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What such 'elephants' did Harry end up hunting?

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### **Creative challenge!**

Your task is to draw 'an elephant in the room'. The tricky bit is that you have to use your drawing to demonstrate what the phrase really means!

## *Hunting Elephants*

# That was then, this is now

The basic plot in *Hunting Elephants* tells us what is happening in Harry's life now – his school camp experience, meeting Doug and the family trip to his Great-uncle Frank's wedding. However, the events happening in the present time are interwoven with flashbacks from twelve months ago when Harry's brother died. James Roy uses these flashbacks to tell us two stories at the same time.

### Question time!

1. Why do you think James Roy mixed the two stories together, rather than telling us all about Joel then moving forward a year to the present-day events?

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2. How would the story change if the two events were told chronologically (that is, in the order the events happened)?

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3. List as many other stories that you know of where the author uses flashbacks to tell us what happened before.

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### Task time!

In your workbooks, re-tell the two main story threads separately using your own words. (Use about three-quarters of a page to a page for each thread.)

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Character acrostic poems

An acrostic poem contains a series of lines in which certain letters, usually the first in each line, form a name, motto, or message when read in sequence.

Your task is to create an acrostic poem for each of the characters; your message will need to show what the character is like.

Try to be creative – you will need to paint a clear picture of the character's personality, so try to use specific, sophisticated vocabulary. (For example, avoid words such as 'nice'!)

Here is an example of an acrostic poem, written by Lewis Carroll in the sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass*. The acrostic spells out Alice's full name – Alice Pleasance Liddell.

**A** boat, beneath a sunny sky  
Lingering onward dreamily  
In an evening of July –

Children three that nestle near,  
Eager eye and willing ear,  
Pleased a simple tale to hear –

Long has faded that sunny sky:  
Echoes fade and memories die:  
**A**utumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,  
**A**lice moving under skies  
**N**ever seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,  
Eager eye and willing ear,  
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,  
**D**reaming as the days go by,  
**D**reaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream –  
Lingering in the golden gleam –  
Life, what is it but a dream?

Now have a go at creating your own acrostic for one of the characters in *Hunting Elephants*!

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Character conversations

In the novel, there are many conversations between the characters that are simply referred to, rather than told in detail. Authors use this technique for a number of reasons; one of the reasons is that this to allow readers to use their imaginations and fill in the gaps themselves.

Your task is to select one of these gaps (listed below) and, with a partner, write the conversation.

- Harry telling his parents about his caving experience (p. 16)
- The argument Harry's parents had before picking him up from school (p. 96)
- Sandy explaining to Frank why they need to stay with him (p. 111)
- Frank telling Harry about his Vietnam war experiences after catching Harry in his caravan (p. 233)
- A conversation between Trent and his father at the wedding (p. 258)
- Luke's parents thanking Harry for saving their son (p. 314)
- Harry talking to Doug at the station – does he stay or does he catch the train? (p. 339)

You will need to perform your conversation in front of the class. Your presentation should go for approximately 3–5 minutes.

Things to remember when doing an oral presentation:

- Remember the aim is to show your understanding of the characters.
- BE CREATIVE! Think of unusual and fun ways to present this to the class.
- Keep your audience entertained by the use of props to enhance your presentation. You might even wish to dress up to really get into character!
- Speak S L O W L Y and clearly – we are all interested in what you have to say! Take deep breaths if you need to stay calm.

You will be marked according to the following criteria:

Criteria	Very High 5	High 4	Med 3	Low 2	Very Low 1
Your understanding of the nature and personality of the characters					
Your body language and use of voice. Did you speak clearly? Did you maintain eye contact? Did you read from notes, or have your presentation rehearsed?					
Use of props and other aids to enhance your presentation					
Your overall preparation and presentation					

**Total: /20**

## *Hunting Elephants*

# When you assume . . .

Have you ever heard the phrase, 'When you assume, you make an ass out of you and me?' The phrase means that you should not make unwarranted assumptions, as it will usually make you look silly.

One of the main themes in the novel is people making assumptions that turn out to be incorrect.

Find as many examples as you can in the novel where this occurs.

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Which films or novels can you think of that have people making incorrect assumptions, with interesting outcomes? Write them below.





## *Hunting Elephants*

# When you assume . . .

Now you have a clear idea of stories that deal with assumptions, it's your turn!

You will need to write a story with the same theme as *Hunting Elephants* – that is, what can happen when you make false assumptions. Your story can be serious or humorous.

You will be expected to draft your work.

**Total: /30**

**Comments:**

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Read all about it!

Residents of the small town of Kalumorra are in total shock – they have just found out their local war hero, Frank Duncan, is not the brave tunnel rat they thought him to be!

You are a reporter for the local newspaper, the *Kalumorra Times*, and have been asked to write an article about Frank Duncan and what his role really was in the Vietnam War.

You have a few options:

- Write an article shaming the townspeople on the danger of making assumptions and how it has been awful for Frank
- Expose the scandal – Frank Duncan should have told the truth
- An interview with Frank Duncan
- An article still making Frank out to be a hero even though he was not a tunnel rat
- Any other ideas you may have for an article – you must discuss this with your 'editor' (class teacher) first.

To help you know what to write: a newspaper article is designed to inform the readers of an event that has occurred. A newspaper article always covers the six Ws:

- **Who** – The name/s and or description/s of the people involved.
- **What** – What was it that happened? Why is it worthy of reporting?
- **Where** – Where did the event occur?
- **When** – When did the event take place?
- **How** – How did the events occur?
- **Why** – What is the reason?

The introduction usually contains a brief summary of what the article is about to encourage the reader to read on! The language use is also very formal.

You may wish to use a real newspaper article to guide you.

Happy reporting!

# *Hunting Elephants* Read all about it!

## WRITING FOLIO ASSESSMENT TASK

Total: /30

Comments:

# Hunting Elephants

## Grief

Although the main story in the novel is about Harry attending his Great-uncle Frank's fourth wedding, if we look closely at the characters we can tell that they are all still grieving the loss of Joel. This grief is not obvious; rather, it is in the background. This is a bit like a movie soundtrack – it sets the mood for the scene, but is not always obvious.

Using the chart below, outline how you think each character is dealing with the grief of losing Joel, with a quote from the novel that tells you this expressly or gives you clues about how they are dealing with it.

Character	Way of coping with grief	Quote	Page

# *Hunting Elephants*

## Grief soundtrack

Grief has been described as a background, or more subtle, theme in the novel, a bit like a movie soundtrack.

Your task is to create a 'grief soundtrack' for *Hunting Elephants*: find five songs each for Harry, Sandy and David to describe the way they are dealing with their grief. You will also need to explain why you chose the song you did.

You may find your grief chart helpful; alternatively list a few adjectives to describe how each character is feeling to get you started.

Be creative with this task – you might wish to consider submitting your songs in an actual CD case and design a front cover.

You will be marked according to the following criteria:

Criteria	Very High 5	High 4	Med 3	Low 2	Very Low 1
Choice of songs and rationale to represent Harry's grief					
Choice of songs and rationale to represent Sandy's grief					
Choice of songs and rationale to represent David's grief					
Your overall preparation and presentation					

**Total:                      /20**

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Cystic Fibrosis brochure

Harry's brother, Joel, had Cystic Fibrosis (CF). Your task is to research this illness.

You will need to look at:

- What the symptoms of the condition are
- Who is likely to suffer from the condition (age groups, percentage of the population, etc)
- What treatment is available
- What research is being done to help
- Where someone with CF can go for help
- Any other interesting information you find out.

Your research will need to be presented in the form of a brochure to inform the public about CF.

You will be marked according to the following criteria:

Criteria	Very High 5	High 4	Med 3	Low 2	Very Low 1
Understanding of the nature of cystic fibrosis					
Use of relevant and interesting information in your brochure					
Brochure is set out in the correct format					
Spelling, grammar and vocabulary					
Your overall preparation and presentation					

**Total:                    /25**

# *Hunting Elephants*

## Chapter review questions

### Chapter 1

1. Why did Harry think he was dying?
2. Who was Joel and what was one of his interests? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.
3. Why didn't Harry want to go exploring caves the next morning?
4. It is unclear to the reader how or when Joel died. Why do you think the author keeps this information from us?

### Chapter 2

1. What kind of a person is Harry's father? How do you know this? (Provide evidence from the text.)
2. How do we know Harry lives in Sydney?
3. Why was Joel's shower so significant to Harry?

### Chapter 3

1. Why do you think Harry was made to go to the wedding?
2. Why was Harry reluctant to see the man at the station do a magic trick?
3. Why was Harry researching the Vietnam War?

### Chapter 4

1. Why was Harry so annoyed about having to go to Uncle Frank's wedding?
2. Why was it that Harry's comment about Joel 'changed the mood instantly'?
3. What is a Vietnam vet?

### Chapter 5

1. Why do you think Harry changed his mind about watching the homeless man's magic trick?
2. Harry's dad says, 'They're all prickly, those vets.' (p. 54) What does the term 'prickly' mean?
3. How does the author try and let the reader know what 'prickly' means?

### Chapter 6

1. What is the implied message when Harry talks about his mum needing an office, right after talking about how Joel's room has been kept exactly as it was before he died (p. 59)?
2. Why do you think Harry's dad calls him Harold?
3. In science class, Harry comments that he had heard the lesson on not making assumptions instead of relying on evidence before that day. Where?

## Chapter 7

1. What did Harry's parents argue about?
2. Why was Harry's mother reluctant to let Harry use Joel's playing cards?
3. What type of accountant is Harry's father? What evidence in the text tells you this?

## Chapter 8

1. What is meant by the term 'survivor's guilt'?
2. 'She also left him with a screen full of guilty reminders of what he'd done.' (p. 86) What do you think is meant by this? What has Harry 'done'?
3. Mrs Ransome suggests that people's hobbies say something about them. What do you think Harry's interest in magic tricks says about him?

## Chapter 9

1. What do you think is the 'big problem' alluded to in this chapter?
2. Why did Harry and his parents end up staying at Uncle Frank's?
3. Why didn't they originally decide to stay at Uncle Frank's?

## Chapter 10

1. Describe Uncle Frank.
2. Describe Greta.
3. Frank describes Trent as 'a good kid, really' (p. 120) What is it about this statement that 'didn't fill Harry with confidence'? (p. 120)

## Chapter 11

1. Why did Harry go for a dawn walk?
2. How did he meet Trent?
3. Why do you think Harry disliked Trent?

## Chapter 12

1. Why was Uncle Frank so sensitive about guns?
2. How do we know Harry likes Fords? Give three examples from the text.
3. What interesting information did Harry and his father find out about Frank?

## Chapter 13

1. What did the author mean when he said, 'He'd headed down a path that was fast becoming overgrown'? (p. 163)
2. Why do you think Frank was upset about Harry getting his information about the war from books?

## Chapter 14

1. Why did Harry enjoy helping Frank fix the car?
2. Harry has another flashback about Joel. What triggers this?
3. What other events in the novel have triggered a flashback about Joel? What do they all have in common? What does this tell us?

## Chapter 15

1. Why do you think Harry decided to go and talk to Trent?
2. What did Harry find unusual about Trent?
3. What mysterious activity does Frank regularly undertake?



### **Chapter 16**

1. What was different about Harry's mother in this chapter?
2. We hear about how Joel was taken to hospital. Piecing together the information from the other chapters, why was he taken to hospital?

### **Chapter 17**

1. Where did Harry go that he shouldn't have? Why?
2. Who found him?
3. After leaving the caravan, why was Harry so nervous about coming face-to-face with Frank?

### **Chapter 18**

1. What does the phrase 'there's an elephant in the room' mean?
2. Why do you think Harry was questioning the truth of Frank's war experiences?
3. Who is Greg and why was Harry so keen to see who he was?

### **Chapter 19**

1. Why was Harry so keen to have a job to do during the wedding?
2. Who are Luke and Daniel?
3. What did Harry say that impressed Trent?

### **Chapter 20**

1. What was the serious event that happened in this chapter?
2. Why was there such an urgency to act quickly?
3. Why couldn't Frank act?
4. Why was it such a brave move for Harry to offer to help?

### **Chapter 21**

1. We can finally piece together in this chapter why Harry feels so guilty over Joel's death. What is this reason?
2. Why was Sandy so angry with David?
3. Why is it significant that the sun came out after Luke was rescued?

### **Chapter 22**

1. Why do you think Harry refused to talk any further about rescuing Luke?
2. What surprising information do we find out about Frank?
3. Why did Sandy think Harry was upset after the trip to Cairns? What was the real reason he was upset?

### **Chapter 23**

1. On page 331, Sandy asks Harry to help her move 'furniture'. What is the implication of this conversation?
2. Why do you think Harry didn't mention what really happened on his trip to his friends?
3. Which other character does this remind you of? Why is this significant?
4. Why do you think the novel ends with Harry talking to Doug?

HUNTING ELEPHANTS  
Teaching Support Kit

Teacher  
'Cheat Sheets'

## *Hunting Elephants*

# The Vietnam War

Throughout the novel, we are given snippets of information about the Vietnam War from Harry's parents, Mrs Ransome, Uncle Frank and Doug.

List all the information the novel provides you about the Vietnam War. Don't forget to include the page number and who the information was from.

Information	Who said it	Page
The war was approximately 35 years ago	Sandy	27
It was long, badly planned, too many people died and ended up being utterly pointless	David	34
There is a famous photo of a girl who had been burned with napalm – it sounds like this was one war technique	David	36
Vietnam vets don't seem to like talking about it	Mrs Ransome	69
The Americans and Australians fought against the North Vietnamese known as the Viet Cong	David	152
The Americans and Australian soldiers were tunnel rats, who fought against the Viet Cong by going into underground tunnels where the Viet Cong were hiding	David	152-3
The tunnel rats tied rope around their waists when they went into the tunnels so their bodies could be recovered	David	153
There were events such as the Agent Orange, the Battle of Long Tan and the fall of Saigon	Frank	166
Some people gave the vets a hard time, spitting on them and calling them names.	Frank	180
The Vietnam War was the last of a number of wars the Vietnamese fought	Frank	184
There was a draft that some people tried to avoid	Doug	336

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Vocabulary mix and match!

Word	Definition
Sump (p. 9)	a pit or well that collects water
Malnourished (p. 14)	Lacking proper nutrition
Protruding (p. 14)	Sticking out
Eclectic (p. 31)	A collection or set made up from different sources
Wheedling (p. 42)	To try and influence someone using flattery
Metallurgical (p. 49)	Relating to the study of metals and their properties
Unruly (p. 49)	Out of control or refusing to conform to rules
Coyly (p. 91)	In a shy manner
Sauntered (p. 102)	Walked in a leisurely manner
Reverential (p. 148)	Someone or something that is regarded with great respect
Vaunted (p. 149)	Bragged or showed off
Scoffed (p. 149)	Poked fun at
Marquee (p. 155)	A large tent or shelter
Tarpaulin (p. 162)	A protective covering, usually made from canvas
Napalm (p. 162)	A product used to make fire-bombs
Glumly (p. 211)	Gloomily
Indignantly (p. 212)	In a manner which shows strong displeasure at something deemed unworthy
Oppressive (p. 219)	Imposing unfair restraints or limitations on someone
Claustrophobic (p. 219)	An extreme fear of confined spaces
Deluge (p. 276)	A flood
Culvert (p. 295)	A drain or channel, like a sewer

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Where are the elephants?

The title 'Hunting Elephants' might be considered a little confusing, given that the novel has nothing to do with actually hunting elephants!

The 'elephants' Harry is hunting refer to the phrase 'an elephant in the room'.

Find out what this phrase means.

The title refers to the colloquial phrase 'an elephant in the room', meaning an important and obvious topic that everyone present is aware of, but which isn't discussed as such discussion is considered uncomfortable.

What such 'elephants' did Harry end up hunting?

The elephants Harry ended up hunting were:

- Joel's death
- Uncle Frank's Vietnam War experiences
- Trent and his relationship with his father and grandfather.

### Creative challenge!

Your task is to draw 'an elephant in the room'. The tricky bit is that you have to use your drawing to demonstrate what the phrase really means!

An example of the kind of thing students might wish to do is below.



## *Hunting Elephants*

# Grief

Although the main story in the novel is about Harry attending his Great-uncle Frank's fourth wedding, if we look closely at the characters we can tell that they are all still grieving the loss of Joel. This grief is not obvious; rather, it is in the background. This is a bit like a movie soundtrack – it sets the mood for the scene, but is not always obvious.

Using the chart below, outline how you think each character is dealing with the grief of losing Joel, with a quote from the novel that tells you this expressly or gives you clues about how they are dealing with it.

Character	Way of coping with grief	Suggested Quotes	Page
Harry	Blames himself for Joel's death	She also left him with a screen full of guilty reminders of what he'd done.	86
Sandy	Desperately hanging on to what she has left	Except sometimes it seemed as if Mum didn't want her mood lightened.  'No, Harry. Let her get it.'	18  20
David	Makes jokes to try and lighten the mood	Dad was stressed by Joel's illness as well, but somehow he managed to keep joking. It was some kind of gift, that ability to lighten the mood.	68  18

## *Hunting Elephants*

# Chapter Review Questions

### Chapter 1

1. Why did Harry think he was dying?  
Harry thought he was dying because he was trapped underwater in a cave.
2. Who is Joel and what was one of his interests? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.  
Joel was Harry's brother. One of his interests was V8 Supercar racing. We know this because Harry and his father talked about going to watch V8 Supercar racing at Mount Panorama (p. 2). We can assume Joel liked this as well because Harry pictured his brother in heaven, wearing his Holden jacket. (p. 1)
3. Why didn't Harry want to go exploring caves the next morning?  
Harry was frightened after his near-death experience and didn't want to go again.
4. It is unclear to the reader how or when Joel died. Why do you think the author keeps this information from us?  
The author keeps this information from us to make us curious about what happened and therefore want to read on to find out more.

### Chapter 2

1. What kind of a person is Harry's father? How do you know this? (Provide evidence from the text.)  
He is a bit of a clown and makes a lot of jokes – pp. 15, 16, 18.
2. How do we know Harry lives in Sydney?  
His father makes a joke about Sydney Water calling about running out of water. (p. 15)
3. Why was Joel's shower so significant to Harry?  
It was the moment when Harry realised his brother was going to die.

### Chapter 3

1. Why do you think Harry was made to go to the wedding?  
His mother was probably still feeling sad about his brother dying and wanted what family she had left to be together.
2. Why was Harry reluctant to see the man at the station do a magic trick?  
The man looked very scruffy and Harry was unsure about him.
3. Why was Harry researching the Vietnam War?  
He wanted to be prepared in case Frank's time in the Vietnam War came up in conversation.

### Chapter 4

1. Why was Harry so annoyed about having to go to Uncle Frank's wedding?  
The wedding was the same time as his best friend's birthday party, which was at a go-karting track.
2. Why was it that Harry's comment about Joel 'changed the mood

instantly'?

The comment made his friends uncomfortable; often people do not know how to react when someone dies.

3. What is a Vietnam vet?

A Vietnam vet is a Vietnam veteran – someone who served in the Vietnam war.

## Chapter 5

1. Why do you think Harry changed his mind about watching the homeless man's magic trick?

Harry probably felt bad about saying no the first time.

2. Harry's dad says 'They're all prickly, those vets.' (p. 54) What does the term 'prickly' mean?

'Prickly' means to be full of troublesome points, or someone who is easily irritated.

3. How does the author try and let the reader know what 'prickly' means?

The author tries to make this meaning clear using Harry's father's anecdote about his work colleague.

## Chapter 6

1. What is the implied message when Harry talks about his mum needing an office, right after talking about how Joel's room has been kept exactly as it was before he died (p. 59)?

It is suggested that his mother should be using Joel's bedroom as an office, but at the moment can't deal with the idea of it.

2. Why do you think Harry's dad calls him Harold?

It's another one of his dad's 'jokes'.

3. In science class, Harry comments that he had heard the lesson on not making assumptions instead of relying on evidence before that day. Where?

Harry had heard the same message about not making assumptions from Doug, the man at the station.

## Chapter 7

1. What did Harry's parents argue about?

Harry's parents argued about Harry's mother using Joel's bedroom as an office.

2. Why was Harry's mother reluctant to let Harry use Joel's playing cards?

Harry's mother did not want Harry to use Joel's cards because it would mean he would disturb things in Joel's room.

3. What type of accountant is Harry's father? What evidence in the text tells you this?

Harry's father is a tax accountant. This is shown when he talks about studying Advanced Taxation Law on p. 76.

## Chapter 8

1. What is meant by the term 'survivor's guilt'?

Survivor's guilt describes the guilt felt of a family member or close friend of someone who has died. The 'survivor' is feeling guilty for either not being the one who died or blaming themselves for the death.

2. 'She also left him with a screen full of guilty reminders of what he'd done.' (p. 86) What do you think is meant by this? What has Harry



'done'?

This quote suggests that Harry somehow blames himself for Joel's death and the list of searches reminds him of this.

3. Mrs Ransome suggests that people's hobbies say something about them. What do you think Harry's interest in magic tricks says about him?  
Teacher to check students' answers individually.

### Chapter 9

1. What do you think is the 'big problem' alluded to in this chapter?  
The big problem is probably Joel's death.
2. Why did Harry and his parents end up staying at Uncle Frank's?  
Harry's mother had not properly confirmed the booking for the cabin at the alpaca farm.
3. Why didn't they originally decide to stay at Uncle Frank's?  
They didn't want to stay with Uncle Frank so as not to be a nuisance to him as he prepares for his wedding.

### Chapter 10

1. Describe Uncle Frank.  
Descriptions such as small, Vietnam vet, loud, strong, etc.
2. Describe Greta.  
Descriptions such as friendly, welcoming, brightly dressed, etc.
3. Frank describes Trent as 'a good kid, really' (p. 120) What is it about this statement that 'didn't fill Harry with confidence'? (p. 120)  
Frank seems to be justifying and not confident in his own words, which makes Harry unsure.

### Chapter 11

1. Why did Harry go for a dawn walk?  
Harry went for a dawn walk to find reception for his mobile in order to text his friend, Michael.
2. How did he meet Trent?  
Harry followed a rabbit; Trent shot the rabbit, narrowly missing Harry.
3. Why do you think Harry disliked Trent?  
Harry probably disliked Trent based on his uncle's comments and Trent's abruptness.

### Chapter 12

1. Why was Uncle Frank so sensitive about guns?  
Frank was sensitive about guns after his time in the war.
2. How do we know Harry likes Fords? Give three examples from the text.  
We know Harry likes Fords because his father gave him a Ford poster, his conversations with Doug and his joke about buying a Ford if you want your car to run properly.
3. What interesting information did Harry and his father find out about Frank?  
Harry and his father discover that Frank is considered a local war hero and loved by the town. They also find out that he was a 'tunnel rat'.

### Chapter 13

1. What did the author mean when he said, 'He'd headed down a path

that was fast becoming overgrown.' (p. 163)

Harry was finding the conversation difficult and couldn't get out of it.

2. Why do you think Frank was upset about Harry getting his information about the war from books?

Frank probably believed books either made a mockery of the war or did not accurately depict it.

#### Chapter 14

1. Why did Harry enjoy helping Frank fix the car?

Harry felt like he was part of a V8 Supercar racing team.

2. Harry has another flashback about Joel. What triggers this?

Harry was drinking a cup of tea.

3. What other events in the novel have triggered a flashback about Joel? What do they all have in common? What does this tell us?

One example is the shower. The events that trigger flashbacks are all ordinary, everyday activities. This tells us that it doesn't take much for Harry to have a flashback and that Joel was a large part of his life.

#### Chapter 15

1. Why do you think Harry decided to go and talk to Trent?

Teacher to check answers; generally to make peace with him.

2. What did Harry find unusual about Trent?

Harry found Trent's gentle and caring attitude towards the chickens unusual.

3. What mysterious activity does Frank regularly undertake?

Frank has a locked caravan where he shuts himself away. No-one is allowed in there.

#### Chapter 16

1. What was different about Harry's mother in this chapter?

Harry's mother was relaxed and chatty.

2. We hear about how Joel was taken to hospital. Piecing together the information from the other chapters, why was he taken to hospital?

Joel was suffocating in his sleep.

#### Chapter 17

1. Where did Harry go that he shouldn't have? Why?

Harry went into Uncle Frank's secret caravan because he was curious about what was in there.

2. Who found him?

Uncle Frank.

3. After leaving the caravan, why was Harry so nervous about coming face-to-face with Frank?

He knew Frank was angry with him about the caravan and their conversation was cut short. Harry was worried there was a confrontation yet to come over his snooping.

#### Chapter 18

1. What does the phrase 'there's an elephant in the room' mean?

The phrase means that there is a huge issue present that no-one is willing

- to discuss.
2. Why do you think Harry was questioning the truth of Frank's war experiences?  
Teacher to check answers.
  3. Who is Greg and why was Harry so keen to see who he was?  
Greg was Trent's father. Harry wanted to see who he was as Trent had said many bad things about him.

### Chapter 19

1. Why was Harry so keen to have a job to do during the wedding?  
Harry was bored and didn't feel like socialising with people he didn't know.
2. Who are Luke and Daniel?  
Luke and Daniel are the children of two different wedding guests.
3. What did Harry say that impressed Trent?  
Harry impressed Trent by remembering the name of the band Trent was listening to when he visited his bedroom.

### Chapter 20

1. What was the serious event that happened in this chapter?  
One of the children, Luke, was trapped in a drain.
2. Why was there such an urgency to act quickly?  
The matter was urgent because the drain was flooding and if not rescued, Luke could possibly drown.
3. Why couldn't Frank act?  
The experience was reminiscent of what happened in Vietnam and he was reluctant to relive this (however, further reading tells us that it is because he wasn't actually a 'tunnel rat' after all, so Frank obviously didn't want to go down and rescue Luke because it wasn't something he had done before and possibly didn't want people to know that).
4. Why was it such a brave move for Harry to offer to help?  
It was very brave for Harry to offer to help as it was a dangerous thing to do, on top of the fact that Harry had nearly died on school camp due to a similar experience of being trapped under water in a cave.

### Chapter 21

1. We can finally piece together in this chapter why Harry feels so guilty over Joel's death. What is this reason?  
Harry blames himself for Joel's death because he unintentionally fell asleep and forgot to give Joel his medication. Joel ended up suffering from complications, was taken to hospital and died. Harry believed Joel died due to the fact he didn't have his medication.
2. Why was Sandy so angry with David?  
Sandy was angry with David for endangering their son's life by letting him go down the drain to rescue Luke.
3. Why is it significant that the sun came out after Luke was rescued?  
The sun coming out after Luke was rescued symbolises the fact that the bad times are over.

### Chapter 22

1. Why do you think Harry refused to talk about rescuing Luke any further?

- Teacher to check answers; possibly feeling unworthy of the praise, too many memories of Joel, etc.
2. What surprising information do we find out about Frank?  
We find out Frank was a mechanic in the war, not a tunnel rat, and therefore not the 'war hero' everyone assumed he was.
  3. Why did Sandy think Harry was upset after the trip to Cairns? What was the real reason he was upset?  
Sandy thought Harry was angry with her for making him look after Joel. He was really upset because he blamed himself for his brother's death.

### Chapter 23

1. On p. 331, Sandy asks Harry to help her move 'furniture'. What is the implication of this conversation?  
The implication is that she is finally going to turn Joel's bedroom into an office for herself.
2. Why do you think Harry didn't mention what really happened on his trip to his friends?  
Harry possibly did not think they would understand.
3. Which other character does this remind you of? Why is this significant?  
This is similar to Uncle Frank; this shows us that Harry can now truly understand him.
4. Why do you think the novel ends with Harry talking to Doug?  
The novel ends with Harry talking to Frank to reinforce the author's idea of not making assumptions.