

Hostage

By Karen Tayleur

ABOUT THE BOOK

Tully McCain has never had a stable home life. Her mother is an alcoholic and has left her in the care of her grandfather, Bamps, and her aunt, Laney. She only has one friend. On Christmas Eve she goes to a pharmacy on Smith Street and a boy from her school drags her into his car and drives 'like there's no tomorrow'. But, for the two of them, maybe there's not.

Hostage takes the reader on a road trip through the things that can trap a person: instability, isolation, poverty, conflict, addictions and fear. Told in small segments, the mystery of Tully McCain unfolds through her recollections and the subsequent police interviews with her that take place after the abduction. We see that she has been held hostage in varying degrees all her life.

Genre

YA fiction

Reading level

Lower to upper secondary students

Interest level

Lower to upper secondary students

The suspense in *Hostage* is beautifully built. The themes are relevant and will appeal to boys and girls. Young adult readers will love putting together the clues throughout this novel to solve the incident under investigation and the mystery that is Tully's life. The structure evokes the workings of memory: how it works to hide and reveal, to trap and set us free.

THEMES

Conflict	Family	Alcoholism/addiction	Growth
Isolation	Love	Fear	Friendship
Betrayal	Poverty	Forgiveness	Anger
Hope	Homelessness/displacement		

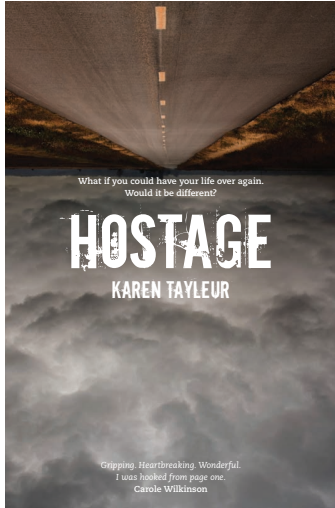


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ENGLISH

Reading Journal

The characters in *Hostage* are trapped in many ways, physically and emotionally. As you read the novel, keep a journal. Note your thoughts on the text and your reactions to the subjects discussed. Note also any clues that suggest what really happened in the Smith Street Pharmacy and what really happened to Tully.

Pre-reading activities

The teenagers in *Hostage* have just finished Year 12. Make a list of the issues and stresses they might confront. Do you face any of these things? What do you rely on to maintain stability in your life?

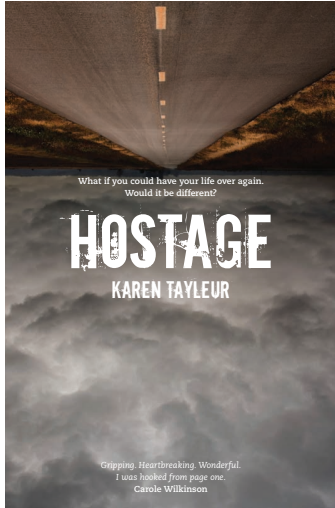
Tully slowly reveals important memories throughout this novel. Write a journal entry about three memories that have shaped you.

Do you ever feel powerless? Make a list of situations in your life when you'd like more power than you have. As a class, compare your lists. Do you ever try to shift the balance of power? How have you done this?

Tully's family life shapes her personality. As a class, make a list of qualities that are essential in a parent. Try to agree on what quality should be at the top of the list.

Are children and teenagers from difficult homes, like Tully, still responsible for their actions? To what degree are they responsible? At what age do they stop being responsible?

Study the front cover. Make some predictions in your journal about the events of the novel.



Reading Activities

01, 02

Karen Tayleur shows the reader things about her characters, rather than telling them things directly. In these chapters, what do you learn about the characters and their relationships? How do you learn these things? (Dialogue, mannerisms, description of setting, etc...)

Tully's descriptions of her neighbourhood are detailed and vivid. What do her descriptions reveal about her?

What are some of the social issues she faces living in Collingwood?

03, 04

In your journal, comment on why the author has included the recipe. What does it show about Tully?

Tully lists a lot of 'maybes' in chapter 04. To what extent do you think fate controls our destiny?

Write about the incident in the pharmacy from Helene's point-of-view. Note all the clues and small details that are provided in the text. Why can't we fully trust Tully's version of the story?

05, 06, 07

What turned Laney sour?

No one is taking notice of Tully. Not the people outside the window. Not the policeman, whom she asks for a drink. How does her present situation mirror her overall life circumstances?

Make a prediction about the importance of the receipt included in chapter 07.

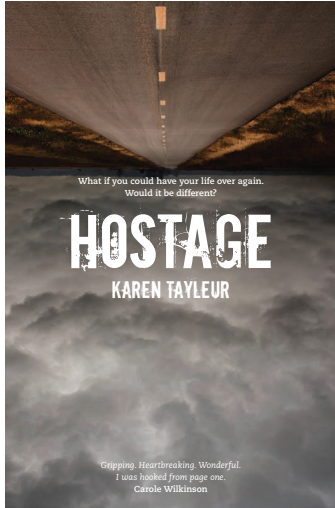


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08, 09

Comment on the difference between the inner and outer Tully. Do you sometimes feel as though you show a different face to the world? What are your different faces? Record your thoughts in a journal entry.

10, 11

Discuss the ways that Tully tries to protect herself from the world.

Do you like Tully at this point in the novel? Why or why not?

“It’s their own fault...I do it because they think they can shut me out...” (p.45)
What do you think of Tully’s reason for stealing?

Tully is an unreliable narrator. What things has she lied about so far in the text?

What small details do you notice about Nathan and what do these details tell you about his character?

Make some predictions about Roo. Who is he? Who is Sasha?

12

‘Knowledge itself is power.’ (p.50) How does this quote relate to the themes of the novel so far? How is knowledge power? Who has the most power in the novel at this point? Tully thinks she has power. Does she really?

13, 14

What do you learn about Griffin from his appearance and actions?

15, 16

Which thing did Tully get wrong? Did Griffin really get anything wrong about Tully?

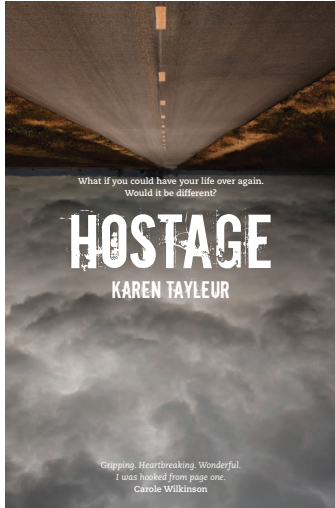


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17,18, 19

Are Tully and Griffin just poor misunderstood kids? (p.75) Do you believe Tully when she says she doesn't know about the stolen money?

20, 21, 22

What do you learn about Tully and Nathan from their conversation in the car?

'I was trying to disappear into nothingness.' (p.89) Write a journal entry on all the ways that Tully tries to disappear in the novel.

23, 24, 25

There's a shift in power in these chapters. How does it happen?

26

Why does Tully not want to be touched? Make some predictions in your journal.

27, 28, 29

Why is Tully's memory tin so important to her?

It's not Griffin who isn't ready to go home. What is Tully searching for on her journey?

31

Describe the mood in this chapter.

Write a journal entry about an important friendship in your life.

32

Write a journal entry explaining how you feel about Tully's mum. Why might she have acted in this way? Can anything excuse her actions? What impression do you have of Craig? How does the author make you feel this way?

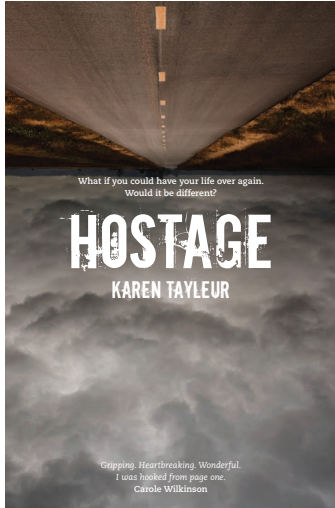


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34, 35, 36

The farm was probably the happiest and scariest time in Tully's life. How does the author's imagery reflect this idea?

What is the significance of the yabbing?

What does Tully see on the night the men go spotlighting? What is revealed about Craig's character?

37

How does the author use imagery in this chapter to highlight Tully's fear?

Discuss how this experience explains, to an extent, Tully's memory of the moment in the pharmacy and her reaction when Griffin pushes her into the car.

What reaction do you have to the scene where Tully shows her underpants to the boys? Why is this scene in the novel?

38

'Don't you get it? It's not all about you.' (p.152) This is the second time someone has said this to Tully. Based on what you know about her life, do you think it is a fair comment to make to her? Why or why not?

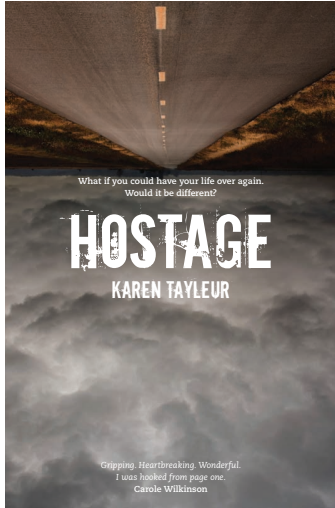
39

The truck pushes Tully and Griffin to the edge of the road. What factors push them to the edge of society? What things are bringing them back?

41

What do you think of the teacher who edited Tully's story? Did she have a responsibility to report what was happening? What responsibility does Roo have?

Discuss the dangers Tully faces in her life and the way she attempts to protect herself against them.



42

What's the impact of the last line of this chapter?

45

Make some predictions about the identity of the other person in the pharmacy.

46

Discuss the letter. Does it make you see Tully's mother in a different light? Do you have more sympathy for her? Why or why not?

47

What really happened?

Structure and format

The book is, in many ways, a journey through Tully's memory.

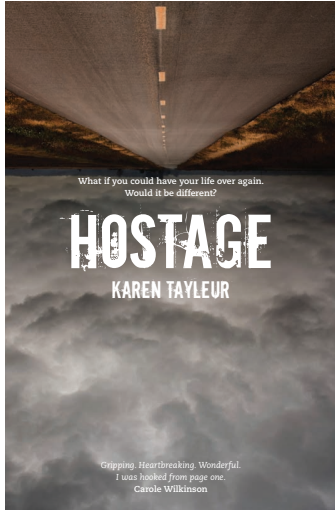
- How does the structure of the novel mimic the way memory works?
- The page numbers and chapter headings highlight Tully's life and experiences. How?
- How do the last lines of p.1 and p.191 mirror Tully's life?
- What is the impact of switching between the third-person narrator and the first-person narrator?

Themes

- As a class, brainstorm the themes of the novel.
- Find a scene in the novel to illustrate each theme.
- Choose a song that represents what you believe is the most important theme of the novel. In groups, share these songs and explain your choice.

Issues

- As a class, make a list of the issues raised in the novel.
- Form groups and choose one issue.



- Your aim is to educate the government and community about the short and long term consequences of your issue for young people. In addition to informing your audience about the problem, you must provide some solutions.

Characters

Complete the table below on the main characters in *Hostage*. Include a quote as evidence from the text to support your views. In the final column explain if and when the character changed.

Name	Positive characteristics/ evidence	Negative characteristics/ evidence	Moment(s) of change

Discussion/Essay Topics

‘It’s just that when you’re on a path, it’s really hard to jump over to another one.’ (p.74) Environments shape people’s lives. Do you agree?

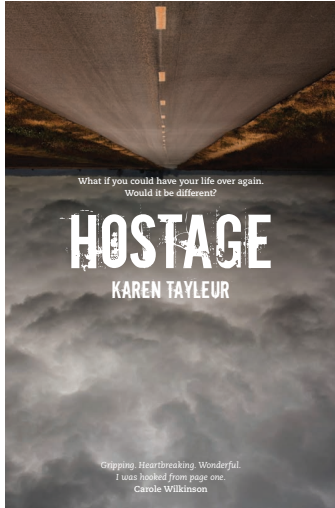
‘If I had money my life would be totally perfect.’ (p.78) To what extent does the lack of money shape Tully’s life?

There are so many ways to be trapped. Being physically trapped is only one of them. Discuss.

Tully’s mother does not deserve sympathy. Her actions are inexcusable. Do you agree?

To go forward you have to go back. Is this what the novel is suggesting?

People will always let you down. Is this the message of the novel?



Teenagers have so much more to deal with today than teenagers of other generations. And life is only getting harder to navigate. Discuss.

Extended Writing Activities

- There are many vivid descriptions in *Hostage*. Karen Tayleur brings Tully's neighbourhood alive in chapter 02. Write a detailed description of your street or neighbourhood. Make it as vivid as Tayleur's. Make it reveal something about you.
- Place is an important part of Tully's life. Compile a series of photographs to illustrate the places that have most impacted on you. (These might not be places where you have lived.) Write a personal essay to accompany the photographs, exploring the reasons why you have chosen these places.
- Write Tully's letter in reply to the one she received from her mother.
- Write a letter from Tully to the girls in her class, explaining her past actions.
- Write a letter to the editor where you argue for increased funding for youth programs in underprivileged areas.
- Write a new scene for the novel. You might choose to add a scene involving Tully and Nathan, Laney, her mother or Griffin. In your scene, highlight some of the key themes of the text.
- Write a short story where you reveal the truth of a moment slowly. You might set your story in the principal's office and use flashbacks and snippets of information.

Drama Activity

Dramatise one of the scenes from the novel and perform it for the class.

Script and perform an advertisement to raise community awareness about your chosen issue.

CREATIVE ARTS

Design a new cover for the book, highlighting the key themes.

Use a series of maps and symbols to represent the events of Tully's life. Do the same for your life.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Tayleur lives in the hills of the Dandenong Ranges with her husband and two kids who always leave their homework to the last minute. For four days a week she earns a living as an editor but for the rest of the time she is a writer.

‘Someone once said that you write for your emotional age level. If this is true, then I am a sixteen-year-old girl who is never going to be part of the in crowd and hopefully never part of the out crowd,’ says Karen.

‘I have teenagers at home and it’s interesting to see how similar our teen experiences are, even with the advent of so much technology. Maybe the saying is true – the more things change, the more they stay the same.’

Karen is the author of *Chasing Boys* and the *David Mortimore Baxter* series.