



THE RUNNING MAN

Written by Michael Gerard Bauer

Joseph Davidson is a quiet, self-conscious fourteen-year-old boy and a talented artist. His world changes, however, when he is asked to draw a portrait of his mysterious neighbour Tom Leyton, a Vietnam veteran who for thirty years has lived alone with his sister Caroline, raising his silkworms and hiding from prying eyes. Because of this he is the subject of ugly gossip and rumour, much of it led by neighbour Mrs Mossop, who views Leyton's brief teaching career with suspicion.

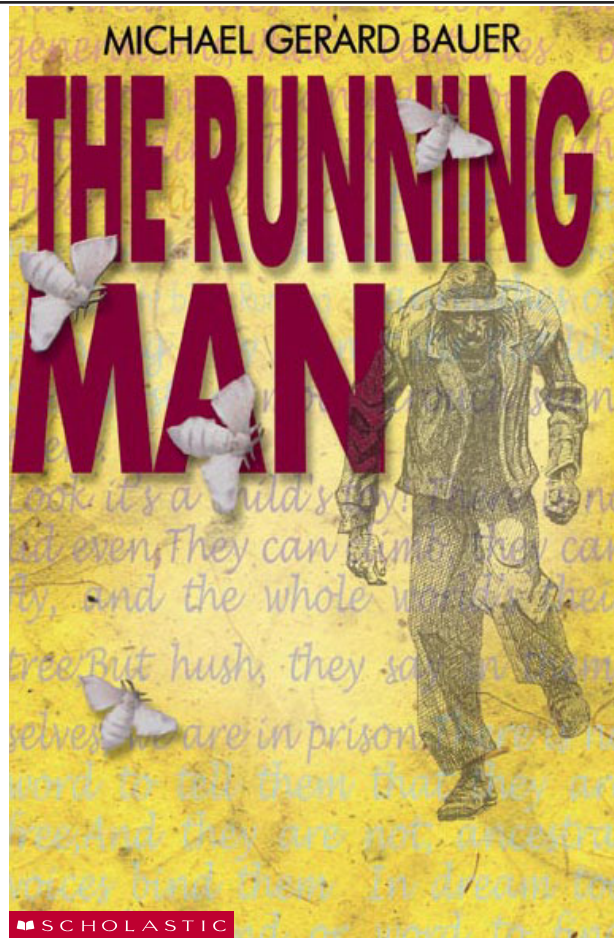
When Joseph finally meets his reclusive neighbour he discovers a cold, brooding man lost deep within his own cocoon of silence. He soon realises that in order to truly draw Tom Leyton, he must find the courage to unlock the man's dark and perhaps dangerous secrets.

But Joseph has his own secrets, including the pain of his damaged relationship with his absent father and his childhood fear of the Running Man – a local character whose wild appearance and strange manner of moving everywhere at a frantic pace terrified him when he was a small boy. These dreams suddenly return when Joseph is forced to face his fears and doubts regarding Tom Leyton.

As Joseph moves deeper and deeper into his neighbour's world he confronts not only Tom Leyton's private hell, but also his own relationship with his father, and ultimately the dishevelled, lurching figure of the Running Man.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

'At the centre of the story is my early childhood memory of searching the mulberry tree in the backyard of our family home for silkworms. I remember praying to find just one silkworm, but of course there were none so it ended in tears, anger and bitter disappointment. That night my brother came home with a box of silkworms given to him by some 'mysterious stranger'. I thought it was a miracle. Later, the same mulberry tree became home to a large lizard (real or imagined) that terrified me. Because of these two memories, the mulberry tree seemed to symbolise something about hope and fear, innocence and experience, good and evil. At first I wrote a poem about it; then I thought it might make a good short story. As I thought about it more,



Michael Gerard Bauer was born in Brisbane and currently lives in the suburb of Ashgrove, the setting of his novel *The Running Man*. Since completing an Arts degree and a Diploma of Education at the University of Queensland, he has taught English and Economics at a number of schools in the Brisbane-Ipswich region. In recent years he has taken regular breaks from teaching to pursue his dream of being a published writer. *The Running Man* is his first novel.



other images and ideas began to tie into the story – the vision of a man shut away in his room raising silkworms, words and themes from one of my favourite poems 'The Silkworms' by Douglas Stewart, and other people and events from my childhood, including of course my own 'Running Man'. I started to see links and connections that began to weave themselves together into a longer story. I began the novel, because I felt there was a story there worth telling and I wanted to see if I could find it, and more importantly, write it, so that others could find it as well. I also wanted to write it because, unlike Joseph in the story, I never spoke to my Running Man or found out why he ran or even what his name was – and I kind of wish I had.

STRUCTURE



The story begins with Joseph attending a funeral. He is with his mother in the front pew. As he gazes at the coffin he tries to make sense of how he came to be there. The story then flashes back as Joseph recalls the events of the previous three months. The final chapter brings us back to the funeral.

'I tried to write each chapter (and each sub-section within the chapters) so that they would build to a point of interest, suspense or drama that would draw the reader deeper in to the novel – like a series of connected short stories' – MGB.

The novel is divided into three parts, each bearing a phrase from Douglas Stewart's poem.

Part I – All Their Lives in a Box – This is a reference to silkworms, to the closed and confined world of Tom Leyton, and to the separate lives that the characters live in their 'box-like' houses in the suburbs. There is also

the connection to the way people are put in boxes and labelled, as Joseph does with the Running Man, and Mrs Mossop does with Tom Leyton. This section deals with the early stages of the relationship between Tom Leyton and Joseph.

Part II – In Dream Too Deep – This part takes us deeper into the hidden world of the characters, revealing their dreams and nightmares. In particular, it can be seen to refer to Tom Leyton who, like the silkworms in the poem, is 'in prison' and seems too deep in his nightmares for Joseph to be able to find him.

Part III – That Pang of Joy – This part covers the lead-up to the funeral where the story started before the flashback. It deals with 'the edge of dying'. There is the worry over the safety of Joseph's father and the subsequent death of Tom Leyton. The 'joy' can be found in both the safe return of Peter Davidson and the metaphorical 'return' of Tom Leyton before his death.

STYLE



'Before I began to write I had an idea in my head of the feel and structure of the novel and the image I kept returning to was that of a silkworm weaving its cocoon. I wanted the various threads of the story that seemed unconnected – Joseph and his relationship with his father, Joseph and the portrait of Tom Leyton and Joseph and his fear of the Running Man – to slowly weave together to produce a strong and powerful climax. In the novel the characters are described as being drawn together as if by silken threads (pp. 27, 70) and Joseph compares trying to unravel the past like spinning silk from a cocoon (p. 3)'

'The other major influence on the writing style (and the storyline itself) was Douglas Stewart's poem "The Silkworms". I tried to capture something of the tone and atmosphere of the poem and so the novel tends to contain quite a lot of imagery, figurative language, metaphor, simile and symbolism' – MGB.

This can be seen in a number of ways. For example:

■ The use of the silkworms to represent Tom Leyton's own confinement ('his cocoon of silence') as well as the transformation he experiences and his changing relationship with Joseph.

■ As well as the more positive images of the silkworms, Tom Leyton is also often associated with images of rock and stone to symbolise his coldness and aloofness (pp. 41, 88, 97, 120) and images of darkness/reptiles/snakes/devils to symbolise the possibility of a darker side (pp. 69, 133, 206).

■ The Escher print is used as a symbol of the coexistence of good/evil, optimism/pessimism. The mulberry tree becomes a symbol of hope (silkworms) and also despair/fear (Gorgo).

■ The use of dreams to symbolise the feelings and desires of characters.

■ Mrs Mossop is associated with bird of prey imagery (p. 45) and the Running Man with fire imagery (pp. 27, 162, 278). He is also described as carrying his own 'hell' inside him (p. 137).

■ The increasing depth and detail of Joseph's portraits to parallel his growing understanding of Tom Leyton. There is also the creation and burning of the 'dark' image.

■ The imagery of the maze and the beast to illustrate Tom Leyton's negative, fatalistic view of life.

■ Tom Leyton filling the mulberry tree with cocoons to symbolise the need for hope and dreams and the possibility of 'miracles'.

BEFORE READING



The following activities could be used to introduce some of the issues raised by the novel.

■ Study the figure on the front cover and read the quote about the Running Man on the back cover. What are your initial impressions of this man? On what do you base these impressions? Discuss the importance of physical appearance in how we judge others and the assumptions we make about them.

■ The words that appear on the cover are from Douglas Stewart's poem 'The Silkworms'. Read the full version of the poem and discuss the themes present, particularly the idea of freedom versus imprisonment; safety and security versus the fear of the unknown; and dreams versus reality.

■ Study M.C. Escher's woodcut entitled *Circle Limit IV*. (Go to www.mcescher.com. Click on 'Gallery' then 'Recognition and Success 1955–1972'.) Do you think the artist is saying anything about the nature of good and evil? What tends to happen if you concentrate on only the black or only the white figures? Discuss the idea of optimism and pessimism, hope and despair.

■ The cover also has silkworm moths on it.

Find out what the class knows about silkworms.

How many people have raised them? Has anyone spun silk? Use the Internet to research silkworms. Investigate different aspects such as lifecycle, raising silkworms, the history of silkworms, the history of silk, how silk is made, and report back. If possible raise your own silkworms in the classroom and record changes daily or weekly. Discuss the idea of change. Do people change? Try to find examples of people who have transformed their lives, beliefs or attitudes.

■ Use the elements of the cover: the image of the man, the title, the moths and some of the words from the poem as stimulus for a short story or poem.

■ Read the quote by Henry David Thoreau. Discuss its meaning. What do we mean when we talk of miracles? Find a dictionary definition of miracles. Do you believe in miracles? Are there things that happen in the world and in life in general that you would call miraculous?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING READING



PART I – ALL THEIR LIVES IN A BOX

Chapter One

1. The story begins with Joseph attending a funeral. What feelings and emotions is he experiencing?
2. As Joseph tries to work out the chain of events that has brought him there, he finds himself thinking of silkworms. Why? (p. 3)
3. When he recalls the recent past, Joseph sees the faces of three men. Who are they and what feature of each man's face is highlighted? (p. 3)
4. The chapter ends with an image of Joseph's neighbours' house. What simile is used to describe it? What effect does it create? (p. 4)

Chapter Two

1. What are the attitudes of Mrs Mossop, Laura Davidson and Joseph towards Tom Leyton?
2. What is Joseph's reaction to the suggestion that he draw Tom Leyton for his school project? (pp. 22–3)
3. What references are there to Joseph's father in this chapter? (pp. 13, 23) How does Joseph respond to any mention of his father?

The author describes the rumours that surround Tom Leyton as a 'tangle of noxious weeds' which hide the 'delicate flower' of truth. Write a poem entitled 'Rumours' and create your own images for the harmful nature of rumours.

Rumour is a pipe

Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,
And of so easy and so plain a stop
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
The still-discordant wavering multitude,
Can play upon it. (*King Henry IV Part II*)

Discuss the effect of rumours in today's society. You might like to consider different areas such as school, media and politics.

Write a scene where Mrs Mossop tells a friend what she thinks about Laura Davidson letting her son Joseph mow the Leytons' lawn.

Chapter Three

1. Why do you think Joseph's childhood nightmare of the Running Man returns?
2. What does Joseph decide at the end of the chapter? Why?

Describe a childhood experience where you were afraid.

Do you remember your dreams? Do you have recurring dreams? Discuss the idea of symbols in dreams.

Draw a portrait of the Running Man using the descriptions on pages 25 and 26.

Chapter Four

1. Mrs Mossop reminds Joseph of a bird. Why? How does this image change as she talks with his mother? (pp. 44–5)
2. What causes Joseph to change his mind and tell his mother and Mrs Mossop that he ‘probably’ would draw Tom Leyton? (pp. 48–9)
3. What feelings and memories does the mango tree arouse in Joseph?
4. What effect does the final incident in this chapter create? (pp. 52–3) How has language been used to achieve this?

Write about a favourite place from your childhood. Try to describe the physical appearance as well as the emotions and atmosphere associated with it.

Draw your own bird caricature of Mrs Mossop or perhaps you could come up with another image for her.

Chapter Five

1. How has this chapter been written and structured to build the tension and suspense leading up to Tom Leyton’s appearance?
2. What impressions does Joseph gain from his first meeting with Tom Leyton? What does he notice about his appearance, his eyes and his voice?
3. Why do you think Joseph offers to return to the Leytons? Why do you think he seems to be ‘drawn towards the shadowy figure of Tom Leyton’?
4. Why does Joseph find his sketches of Tom Leyton unsatisfactory? Why is his memory of his art teacher Mr De Groot significant?

Joseph feels nervous and self-conscious as he tries to draw Tom Leyton. (pp. 62–3) Write about a time when you have felt like this – perhaps performing or speaking in front of a group, sitting for an exam or meeting/going out with someone for the first time.

*Use the library or Internet to find some examples of early Colonial art. Are the depictions of people, animals and the landscape accurate? If not, why do think this is so? Try the following website:
www.portfolio.mvm.edu.ac.uk/studentwebs/session1/group65/pictorialreps.htm*

Chapter Six

1. When Joseph arrives for his second drawing session, what changes have occurred to the silkworm eggs and to Tom Leyton?
2. Read the description of Tom Leyton’s room. (pp. 84–5) What does the room suggest about the man who lives there?
3. What do the two drawings that Joseph sees on the notice board – Escher’s angels and devils and the illustration of Frankenstein’s monster – suggest to you about Tom Leyton? (pp. 86–7)
4. Joseph comments that the image of Frankenstein’s monster ‘just looks like a normal man’. What is the effect of Tom Leyton’s reply, ‘Most monsters do’?
5. In what ways could the lines of the poem that Tom Leyton recites relate to him? (pp. 95–6)
6. How has Joseph’s impression of Tom Leyton changed by the end of Part I? What has caused this change?
7. Why do you think Part I of the novel is called ‘All Their Lives in a Box’?

The picture Joseph finds of the ‘swirling worlds of devils and angels’ is Circle Limit IV by M.C. Escher. (You can find it at www.mcescher.com – go to ‘Gallery’ then ‘Recognition and Success 1955–1972’) What is your reaction to the drawing? What ideas or themes do you think the artist was expressing in creating this image?

When Joseph reads ‘The Silkworms’ he likes the ‘soft calming sound of the words and the pictures they created in his imagination.’ Read through the poem carefully. What lines or phrases appeal to you? What is the effect of the words or images used?

Draw up a list of the characters. Beside each one write a brief description of their physical appearance, personality and your opinion of them.





Chapter Seven

1. Where does Joseph feel that he will find the ‘real Tom Leyton’? (p. 113) Why would he think this?
2. Tom Leyton is described as looking at a book ‘like a father at his child’s coffin.’ Explain this use of simile. Do you think it is effective?
3. After Tom Leyton tells the story about searching for silkworms when he was a child he asks Joseph, ‘Do you believe in miracles?’ How would you respond to this question?

Choose a vivid childhood memory, one that has made a strong impression on you for some reason. Describe it and reflect on its impact and significance to your life.

Tom Leyton says that reading was once ‘like breathing’ to him. Discuss or debate the topic that computers and the Internet will be the death of books, as we now know them.

Chapter Eight

1. What is Joseph’s reaction to the two photographs he finds in the downstairs room? (pp. 125–6)
2. After Joseph speaks of the Running Man, Tom Leyton says, ‘Perhaps you’ve never seen him.’ What does he mean by this?
3. What connection does Tom Leyton make between himself and the Running Man (p. 136). Which of his comments regarding the Running Man do you think could also apply to him?
4. How does the ending of this chapter leave us with an uneasy feeling about Tom Leyton?

Tom Leyton imagines the silkworms being lost in the fire but Gorgo surviving stating that, ‘nightmares are much harder to destroy than other dreams’. Do you agree? Are our fears more powerful than our hopes and desires?

Chapter Nine

1. How does the description of the two drawings of Tom Leyton (p. 140) parallel Joseph’s changing relationship with him?
2. How does Tom Leyton’s experience in Vietnam affect your view of him?
3. Why is Tom Leyton so bitter towards the chaplain and his blessing of, ‘God’s speed’? (pp. 147–8)
4. At the end of Tom Leyton’s story, ‘the world for Joseph tilted so that even the most familiar and comfortable things appeared strange and oblique.’ Why does he feel this way?
5. What insight does the story of Mrs Battista give to Tom Leyton’s character?
6. What does Tom Leyton mean when he says the silkworms have become his ‘metaphor for life’? (p. 154) What does this tell you about the man?

7. Despite his pessimism, why is Joseph still drawn to Tom Leyton? (p. 157)
8. Why is the fact that Tom Leyton uses Joseph’s name significant? (p. 158)

Debate the proposition that ‘truth is the first casualty of war’.

Write a reflective piece on your attitude to life. Are you generally an optimistic or pessimistic person? Do you agree with Tom Leyton that we are all, ‘Flapping our crippled wings, dreaming we can fly’? (p. 155) What would be your metaphor for life?

When Tom Leyton says that they sent Mick home ‘Too late, too early’ (p. 146), he is quoting from Bruce Dawe’s poem ‘Homecoming’. Read the poem. What are the themes of the poem? How is it relevant to Tom Leyton’s experience? Examine Dawe’s use of metaphor and simile at the end of the poem. What does the phrase ‘Too late, too early’ mean?

Chapter Ten

1. What is it about the Running Man’s eyes that strike Joseph? (p. 162)
2. Why is Joseph so surprised that the Running Man knows the poem? (pp. 165–6) In what way had the Running Man ‘escaped from the box that Joseph had put him in’?
3. What does the story of the foolish son and the maze indicate about Tom Leyton’s view on life? (pp. 168–72)
4. How does the end of this chapter build interest and suspense for the reader? (p. 175)

‘Maybe there’s more to the Running Man than meets the eye’ (p. 166). Do we tend to judge people by appearances without really ‘seeing’ them? What are the dangers of ‘putting people in boxes’ and stereotyping them? Why do we do this?

Write about a time when your preconceptions about someone have been changed or challenged. How had you formed your original impression? What made you re-think your view? What did you learn from the experience? Have you ever been stereotyped or pre-judged by others in some way?

Research a group or individual you feel has been unfairly labelled or stereotyped in some way. Find information that challenges the stereotypical views.

Chapter Eleven

1. What change does Joseph discover in Tom Leyton's room? Why is it important? (p. 177)
2. What is Caroline's reaction when Joseph says about her brother, 'I like him now.'? Why does she react like this? (p. 184)
3. What caught Joseph's attention in the newspaper article on Tom Leyton? (p. 187) How does Tom Leyton react to seeing the article? (p. 190)
4. What does Joseph learn about the Running Man in this chapter and how does it change the way he feels about him?
5. Read closely the conversation between Joseph and Tom Leyton about the 'baggage' people carry through life. (pp. 193–4) How is this significant to their relationship?

Use the information provided in the chapter to write the newspaper articles concerning Tom Leyton and Simon Jamieson.

Chapter Twelve

1. Why did Joseph like returning the books to Tom Leyton's shelves? (p. 196)
2. How does the opening of the cocoons mark a new stage in the relationship between Tom Leyton and Joseph? (pp. 195–8)
3. How does the mood change dramatically in this chapter? (p. 200)
4. How are our preconceptions of Mrs Mossop challenged in this chapter? (p. 204)
5. How does the Running Man dream change for Joseph?

Fill in the gap that occurs in the novel when Mrs Mossop rushes from the room followed by Laura Davidson. Write the scene that takes place back at Mrs Mossop's house.

Draw, paint or present in whatever form you like, one of the powerful images from Joseph's nightmare about Tom Leyton. (pp. 205–7)

Chapter Thirteen

1. What feelings does Joseph reveal towards his father? (p. 208)
2. Why does Joseph want to visit Tom Leyton? (p. 209)
3. How are silkworm moths used to symbolise another change in the relationship between Tom Leyton and Joseph? (p. 213)
4. What does Joseph do to the portrait of Tom Leyton? Why? (213–4)
5. Joseph goes alone to meet Tom Leyton 'face to face'. Why does he do this? (p. 215) What do you think of his actions?

6. What is Joseph's initial reaction to the terrible secret that Tom Leyton reveals to him? How does the burning of the portrait and the writing of the note indicate his feelings towards the man? (pp. 224–5)
7. What is Joseph's response to Tom Leyton's suggestion that he doesn't have to see him any more? Why is this response so important to Tom Leyton? (pp. 228–30)
8. What changes have you observed in Joseph's character at this point?
9. What atmosphere does the ending of the chapter create? (p. 230)
10. Looking back, what was the relevance of the title of Part II – In Dream Too Deep?

Write the thoughts and concerns of Laura Davidson as she watches her son leave to visit Tom Leyton.

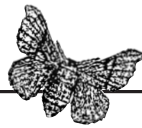
Draw the dark portrait Joseph makes of Tom Leyton. (p. 213)

Write two diary entries by Tom Leyton – the first after he reveals his secret to Joseph and the second after Joseph's visit a couple of days later.

As Tom Leyton tosses the cocoons into the fire he says, 'Silkworm, silkworm burning bright,' and then, 'Did he who made the Lamb make thee?' He is making a reference to William Blake's poem 'The Tyger'. Read the poem. How might its themes be relevant to some of the issues raised in the novel?

'The fact is that war changes men's "nature". The barbarisms of war are rarely committed by abnormal men. The tragedy of war is that the horrors are committed by normal men in abnormal situations – situations where the ebb and flow of everyday life is replaced by a round of fear, anger, blood and death.'

Use this quote from the film *Breaker Morant* to discuss your reaction to Tom Leyton's experiences in Vietnam. How responsible is he for his actions?



Chapter Fourteen

1. This final section of the novel is called ‘That Pang of Joy’. What feelings or expectations about the ending does this title arouse in you?
2. What effect does the presence of one, Caroline, and two, Tom Leyton, have on Joseph’s ability to deal with the news from Bougainville? (p. 236)
3. Joseph recalls being woken up by his parents’ arguing. What was the cause of their argument? (pp. 241–2)
4. Joseph remembers a particular day as both the best and the worst day of his life. Why did he feel this way about the day? (pp. 243–47)
5. What does it feel like for Joseph when he tries to pray for his father’s safety? (pp. 248–9)

Joseph tried to write a letter to his father but couldn’t find the words. Write the letter that you think Joseph would have wanted to send.

Write a conversation between Peter Davidson and a workmate where he talks about the conflict at home with his wife and son. Try to bring out how he feels about them and why he chooses to work away from home so much.

Chapter Fifteen

1. After the bad news comes from Bougainville, Joseph goes to see Tom Leyton. While there he stares at the Escher print. What does he see and how does this indicate his state of mind? (p. 252)
2. What kind of miracles does Tom Leyton suggest he could believe in? (p. 253)
3. What does Tom Leyton mean when he begs Joseph not to be ‘poisoned’ by him? (pp. 252–54)
4. What image does Tom Leyton use to try to explain how Joseph has changed him? (p. 254) In what way have the roles of the two characters been reversed at this stage of the novel?
5. When Joseph wakes up in the morning how does his view of the world echo the story Tom Leyton told about the son in the maze? (p. 256)
6. Why do you think Mr Leyton refers to the mulberry tree as his ‘miracle’? (p. 260) What was his motivation for creating it?
7. What do you think Tom Leyton told Joseph to say to the Running Man?

Discuss Tom Leyton’s ideas on miracles. Is the world full of miraculous things that we often fail to see?

Compose a letter that Tom Leyton might have written for Joseph after his visit the previous night.

Chapter Sixteen

1. What does Caroline mean when she tells Joseph he ‘already had’ saved her brother’s life? (p. 268)
2. What is the significance of Joseph’s decision to try to draw his father? (p. 269)

Chapter Seventeen

1. What does Caroline mean when she says that in many ways her brother died in the war? (p. 271)
2. When Joseph pursues the Running Man he gets ‘close enough to feel the laboured pain of his flight’ and their footsteps pound ‘together like heartbeats’. How do these descriptions show a different attitude towards the Running Man? (pp. 274–5)
3. What is the significance of Joseph’s using the name Mr Jamieson? (p. 278)
4. What do you think Simon Jamieson is referring to when he says, ‘All their lives ...’? (p. 278)
5. Why are the words suggested by Tom Leyton significant to the themes of the novel? (p. 279)

As Joseph, write a eulogy or poem for Tom Leyton.

Write a thank you note from one of the primary school children to the ‘Silkworm Man’. Decorate it with drawings of caterpillars, moths and cocoons.

Draw Joseph’s final portrait of Tom Leyton. (p. 273)

Describe the final scene between Joseph and the Running Man from Simon Jamieson’s perspective. Use a ‘stream of consciousness’ style.

Epilogue

1. What effect is created by the description of Simon Jamieson’s dream?
2. Does the novel present an optimistic or pessimistic view of people and the world?

Choose either Mrs Mossop, Laura Davidson, Peter Davidson, Caroline Leyton or Mr Cousins and describe a dream that they might have.



■ The novel begins and ends in St Jude's Church. What is the significance of this name to the themes of the novel?

■ To whom does the title of the novel refer? The Running Man is the name Joseph gives to Simon Jamieson, but Tom Leyton says at one point, 'Everybody runs.' (p. 135) What does he mean by this? What other characters in the novel 'run'? What are they running away from or running to? Is their running a good or bad thing in your opinion?

■ The novel follows the life cycle of the silkworms. Tom Leyton says towards the end '... sometimes I feel like a moth just out of the cocoon ... only I don't know what I've changed into ... or what I'm supposed to *do* ... or why I've been given wings if they're crumpled and useless?' (p. 254) What other references or connections can you find between Tom Leyton and the various stages of the silkworms?

■ Read Douglas Stewart's poem 'The Silkworms' carefully. What connections can you find between ideas and lines in the poem and elements in the story?

■ Choose a scene from the novel and act it out.

■ Look over the character descriptions you wrote at the end of Part I. Are they still accurate? What would you add to them or change? Have your preconceptions been challenged?

■ Write a short story based on something that happened in Peter Davidson's past that helps us understand him and 'see' him more clearly.

■ Certain images tend to be associated with particular characters. For example: Tom Leyton – rock/stone, reptile, silkworms; the Running Man – fire; Mrs Mossop – bird. Find examples of these. What is their significance? What do they say about the character?

■ Write a letter from Laura Davidson to her husband in hospital, where she explains her feelings about knowing he is safe, about Joseph, and about the events that have taken place at home.

■ Write a chapter of the novel that takes place either before or after the events covered in the story.

■ View *Breaker Morant*. Discuss the relevance of its themes to the novel. Write a review of the film.

■ Interview one of the characters from the book.

THEMES



■ **The dehumanising nature of war** – shown through its impact on Tom Leyton. Does war change 'men's nature'? Is Tom Leyton responsible for what he does or is he just a normal man in an abnormal situation?

■ **The search for identity** – Tom Leyton struggles to find himself and to come to terms with who he is. This is shown as he confronts the old photos and Joseph's portrait and is symbolised in the illustration from *Frankenstein*. It is also evident in the way that Joseph eventually comes to understand the Running Man and sees him as a person – Mr Jamieson – not as a label.

■ **How we perceive others – appearance v reality:** '... if it is so difficult to really see these simple creatures, then how much harder is it to see a man?' (p. 135). Tom Leyton asks Joseph this question to challenge his narrow labelling of the Running Man. The novel challenges the way people are labelled, stereotyped or put in boxes. What we see is often just a thin slice of their life and of who they really are.

■ **The nature of miracles** – 'Perhaps we have the wrong idea about miracles. Perhaps they're not spectacular at all ... just slow and tedious ... the way a glacier carves out a valley but you can't see it' (p. 253). The novel raises questions about the nature of miracles and whether we should believe in them.

■ **The healing power of love** – Seen mainly through the impact of Caroline and Joseph on Tom Leyton, as well as in the potential reuniting of Joseph and his father.

■ **The resilience of the human spirit – how we cope with tragedy** – Tom Leyton, Caroline Leyton, Simon Jamieson and Mrs Mossop are characters who face tragedy and 'survive' in their own way 'carrying their baggage'. The novel also looks at the contrasting responses of hope and despair to the tragedies that occur in life.

■ **The possibility of change** – The theme of change comes through the life cycle of the silkworms and through the stories of Simon Jamieson and Tom Leyton. Some characters are changed in a negative way by their experiences, but the novel also offers the hope of rebirth.

■ **Safety/security vs the fear/risk of the unknown** – These are the main themes of Douglas Stewart's poem. The silkworms stay where 'they are safe for ever' but they can only 'dream' of flying. Tom Leyton hides in his self-made 'prison'. Joseph prefers 'keeping to himself' (pp. 50, 52 – mango tree; p. 160 – bus shelter). Tom Leyton threatens Joseph's secure world (p. 150).

■ **The importance of family** – Shown through Caroline's support of her brother and the tragedy of Simon Jamieson's losing his wife and children. The importance of a male role model is explored through the absence of Joseph's father (p. 241) and the way Joseph is drawn to Tom Leyton.

■ **Mateship** – shown through Tom Leyton's experiences in the Vietnam War.