



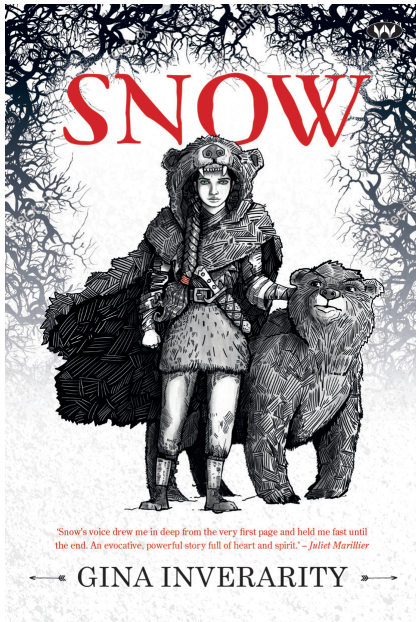
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TEACHERS' NOTES

Snow

By Gina Inverarity

Notes prepared by Gina Inverarity © 2020



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1. Introduction to Snow

*When the girl brought my bowl she was in and out through the door like she couldn't move fast enough.
And when the lock clicked after her I found something she'd left. A knife. And not one for spreading butter,
but a sharp one for slitting throats.*

Locked in a cell by her stepmother, Snow grows small but she still grows. Even so, she's hardly a match for a world gone wild, where the sun has disappeared behind clouds for good. The night the hunter takes her into the forest with orders to cut out her heart, Snow makes him a promise she isn't sure she can keep. And then she runs.

Snow's life is no fairytale. As she grows up her path will take her into the mountains, over misty passes, desolate gorges and alpine rivers, as well as to the city, where she will make her case for the return of what is hers.

And her childish promise will not be forgotten.

A dark and lyrical *Snow White* retelling set within a post-climate-change world, *Snow* is a fairytale of the future.

Advance Praise for Snow

'Snow's voice drew me in deep from the very first page and held me fast until the end. An evocative, powerful story full of heart and spirit.'

– **Juliet Marillier, author the *Warrior Bards* series**

'Dark, enchanting and visceral. A classic fairytale brilliantly reimagined for our rapidly changing world.'

– **Margot McGovern, author of *Neverland***

'I love *Snow*! It's so clever and just beautiful to read. What a great story.'

– **Belinda Bolliger, Editorial Manager, Scholastic Australian Standing Orders**

2. About the author

Gina grew up in South Australia and started work in publishing at Wakefield Press as an editorial assistant, receptionist and book packer after finishing her degree in Professional Writing and Communications at UniSA.

Later, when her daughters were young, Gina worked as an editor at the wonderful children's publisher Omnibus Books. In 2014 she gained her honours degree in English from Victoria University and two years later her first picture book, *The Brown Dog*, was published by Working Title Press (now HarperCollins). Gina lives in Wellington, New Zealand.



Photo by Penny Nelson

3. Inspiration behind the novel

Together with her partner Gina owns a forest in the Wairarapa region of the North Island and hopes to live there one day. Snow was inspired by that forest as well as her travels in New Zealand and especially the stunning high country and wildlife of the South Island.

It's heart-breaking to imagine what sort of devastating impact aspects of climate change will have on this environment. Young people are leading the way on anti-fossil-fuel activism and slowly changing the culture of denial.

In *Snow*, Gina has imagined a world that has returned to the wild and asks the question, can people return to a simpler way of living?

In this way, *Snow* is both a version of the eighteenth-century, pre-industrial folktale *Snow White*, and also a post-apocalyptic dystopian novel. But it is the qualities demonstrated by the non-human characters in the novel that Gina hopes we can learn the most from. Little Bear, the falcon, the high country dogs and the bird choir demonstrate qualities such as compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity and wisdom that inspire the human characters' behaviour.

4. Key curriculum links

These teacher's notes have been designed as a companion to the novel, *Snow*, with the aim of encouraging students to engage more closely with the text to promote emotional intelligence, critical interpretation, and a deeper understanding of using the English language for creative writing purposes.

The suggested questions and activities will encourage students to think critically and creatively, and to promote interpretation of meaning and themes behind the text. Additionally, students can examine the novel's style, voice, and point of view with questions that encourage group discussion and communication.

The following sections outline suggested questions to ask students, and activities to be performed to encourage group discussion and class engagement. They have been broken down into sections to enable teachers to identify which topics most suit their class or teaching style, or alternatively, for one or two questions to be selected from every section.

Learning Area, English Year 7–10

Literature

- Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1633 - Scootle)
- Present an argument about a literary text based on initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text (ACELT1771 - Scootle)
- Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635 - Scootle)
- Analyse texts from familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and discuss and evaluate their content and the appeal of an individual author's literary style (ACELT1636 - Scootle)
- Investigate and experiment with the use and effect of extended metaphor, metonymy, allegory, icons, myths and symbolism in texts, for example poetry, short films, graphic novels, and plays on similar themes (ACELT1637 - Scootle)
- Analyse text structures and language features of literary texts, and make relevant comparisons with other texts (ACELT1772 - Scootle)

5. Discussion questions and activities prior to reading the book

Read *Snow White* by Jacob Ludwig Karl and Wilhelm Carl (the Brothers Grimm) – don't worry, it's only short!

- https://germanstories.vcu.edu/grimm/schneeeng_cols.html

The fairytale you just read was partly the inspiration for the novel but even this *Snow White* was a version of an even older story. The Grimm brothers recorded many old European folk tales in their famous book *Children's and Household Tales*, first published in 1819.

- What is a version? Write a definition.
- How many other books or films can you think of that are 'versions' of an older story? What is the value of 'updating' a classic story, do you think?
- What themes from the 'original' *Snow White* are still relevant in modern society? You might think about family relations, feminist issues, power imbalances or technology.

6. Discussion questions and activities while reading the book

Theme

As you read *Snow*, make notes on the following themes and include quotes that you think best demonstrate each theme:

- Communication without the internet
- Life without electricity
- The death of a loved one and grief
- Climate change
- Refugees
- Surviving off the land

Character

Include quotes in your notes to demonstrate aspects of the following characters:

- Snow, hunter, Rain, Cook, Fox, Little Bear, The falcon

Language

Snow's voice is a bit unusual.

- Make a list of some of the words she and the hunter use that are not 'proper' English. Why do you think they speak this way?

Stylistic Features:	Writer's Purpose:
E.g. Snow's odd way of speaking	E.g. Language evolves over time so perhaps this helps to show that the story is set in the future

7. Questions to consider after finishing the book

Answer the following questions using quotes from the text to back up your answers:

Nature and climate change

This version of *Snow White* is set in a world where magic had been replaced by science, and myth by recorded history but where both are fading in the absence of technology. The sense of wonder in nature is more palpable than ever. Snow's connection with the environment she inhabits is visceral – it couldn't be called magical, but nor could it be measured or quantified.

- What are some examples of Snow's connection with nature?
- Make a list of non-native animals in the place where you live. How can you tell if an animal is a 'pest' or not?

Character

Snow is an inspiring heroine but also prone to single-mindedness and to using her independence as a shield.

Growing up wild, she has few adult influences and teaches herself many of the skills she needs to survive. Pursued by her stepmother, who had ordered her murdered, Snow is on the run. In many ways this suits her but she longs for contact with people and to be free. To do this she must reclaim the property her father left her and her stepmother occupies, but uneducated and alone, she has no idea how to go about it.

- From your notes, do you have examples of Snow showing stubbornness? What about ignorance? If you were able to, would you be able to give Snow any advice? What would it be?
- The animal characters don't speak, but still we learn about their personalities. How is this shown in the writing? Use quotes as examples.

Post-climate-change life is difficult for everyone, but women in remote areas suffer more than most without access to medical care.

Snow has borne the consequences of this, losing both her birth and adoptive mothers in her early years. These losses contribute to her strong sense of independence but also leave her morally rudderless. Her stepmother is vain and mean-spirited, becoming even more so after Snow's father died. He was not a king but as a landowner and landlord he was able to offer conditional shelter to those in need. Hence Snow's nickname 'Little Queen' and her stepmother's usurping of control first of the chateau and then of the city council as Mayoress.

Ultimately, as in the original fairy tale, the stepmother is driven by jealousy to get rid of the stepdaughter she sees as her rival. In contrast to this behaviour Cook teaches Snow the value of a kind heart and she learns about other people's motivations through experience.

- Fill out the table below

Snow's character traits	Character she learns from
E.g. kindness	E.g. Cook

Lack of technology

In *Snow's* vision of the future the fossil fuel economy has collapsed and many of the conveniences of modern life have disappeared.

In this way, *Snow* is a utopian, agrarian vision of the future, but as in any utopia, dark undercurrents haunt the human population, as they have throughout history. There has always been utopian and dystopian fiction, but in the face of the climate crisis a new genre of fiction has emerged in which storytellers are grappling with how to imagine a world that is unimaginable. The reality of a changing climate is with us in every aspect of modern life.

- Look up and then write your own definitions of 'utopian' and 'dystopian'. What are the differences? Which would you call *Snow*?
- How would you cope without modern conveniences? Think about cars, phones, computers, even electricity. What would you miss the most? What would be different about your life without these things? What would be the same?

Climate change

Snow's Aotearoa/New Zealand has been enveloped in a permanent long white cloud. This weather system has not shifted for decades, resulting in long seasons similar to those at the North and South poles. In an echo of other environmental disasters such as Chernobyl, however, nature has moved in to take over when people have retreated. A new kind of ecosystem has evolved, challenging the understanding of what is native and non-native.

- Can you think of a place, perhaps an old house or a ruin, where nature has started to take over once again? Write a description of what this looks like. Perhaps you've seen a weed growing up between cracks in a footpath, what would happen if the weed was allowed to keep growing?
- If you could have a wild animal like Little Bear as a companion, what would it be? Why? Write a short paragraph describing your animal. What is its name? Male or female? How do you communicate?

Refugees

Already Australia and New Zealand are receiving refugees from islands in the Pacific region that are being affected by rising sea levels.

- What do you think about how strangers are treated in *Snow*? Are they welcomed or turned away?
- In the original Grimm fairytale, the main character has 'skin as white as snow'. The author of *Snow* has deliberately not described the main character this way. Why do you think that might be? Where do you think *Snow's* real mother came from?

The hunter is struggling to come to terms with events in his life, his job often in conflict with his ethics. By the end of the novel the hunter has to face the consequences of his actions, including the original act of harm – leaving *Snow* alone in the forest.

- What do you think about how the hunter behaved? Were his actions justified? Or could he have chosen a less harmful path? Do the good things he did outweigh the bad? Is it ethical to do a good deed to make up for a bad one? Discuss this in a group. Use examples from the book.