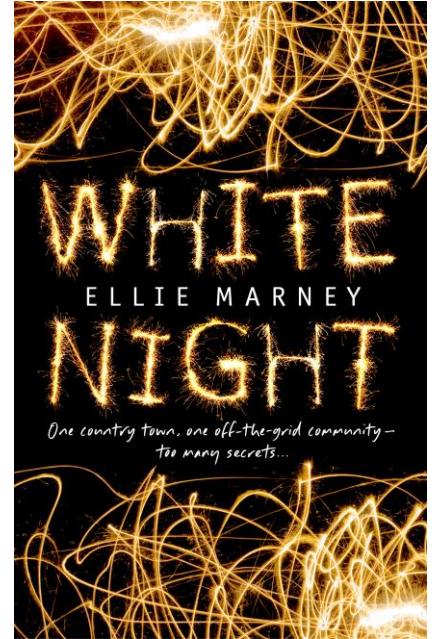


White Night

By Ellie Marney

March 2018 ISBN 9781760293550 paperback
Recommended for 13- to 18-year-old readers



Summary

Bo is in Year 11 at a country high school, comfortable in his life and not questioning his existence. Until he meets Aurora, who has grown up on a nearby commune and is only attending 'normal' high school for the first time. Aurora belongs to an 'off the grid' radical environmental community and is socially disconnected and awkward, but Bo is drawn to her and they form a friendship. Bo is initially intrigued by her community's 'no footprint' philosophy, but gradually comes to believe that the commune is not a utopia, but a kind of prison, and that their goal to go 'off the grid' may be more permanent – and more dangerous – than anyone could have predicted.

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Ellie Marney has achieved a rare feat of ventriloquism.

She writes from the point-of-view of a different gender (and generation) entirely convincingly, bringing to life her modern-day teenage boy protagonist, Bo Mitchell.

Marney's first person narrative is also told in the present tense, once highly rare in the novel genre but increasingly favoured, especially in novels for young adults. This is because, despite being difficult to manage in a writing sense, it brings an immediacy and a sense that the action is unfolding at the same time for the characters and for the reader. This gives it a different feel to traditional past tense narration, with its conceit that all the events have already taken place and are being relayed to the reader after the fact.

White Night demonstrates strong writing in a layered, suspenseful plot with an intriguing cult element that will appeal to teenagers. And Ellie Marney writes romantic sexual tension *very* well, without introducing material inappropriate for the classroom.

Themes

- family
- communes
- cults
- environmental politics
- high school friendships and romance
- rural setting

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Discussion questions & classroom activities

1. Break students up into groups and ask each group to spend one lesson researching the following:

- The Rajneesh movement, or Sannyasins
- Jim Jones and the Jonestown massacre
- The Raelians
- The Moonies

Come back together to hear brief presentations from each of the groups and, in a whole class discussion, come up with a list of elements common to these cults.

2. *I don't know how to reply. I mean, what's worse? To say, Yes, it's just you they do this to. Or to say, Yes, this is high school – because it bloody is. This is the animal pack mentality of high school; eat or be eaten, know your place in the social order, cringe and cower when you're expected to. If you're different you're a target.* (page 129)

- Is this a fair description of high school in your opinion? How might students be able to change this state of affairs?

3. Much attention is spent on Bo's relationship with his mother and father in the story but less is known about Rory's relationship with Star, Ray and Daniel.

- How do you think Rory has been affected by her family's unusual approach to parenting and do you think she would choose the same for her children? Use scenes from the novel to illustrate your answer.

4. Which character undergoes the most change throughout the novel: Bo, Rory, Shandy or Sprog? In your answer make sure you include a description of the person they were in the early part of the novel and the person they become at its close.

5. Language exercises:

(a) *We've arrived at her 'front yard', if you could call it that – there's no manicured lawn, though...You should have a party here at night. Candles, the fire going, some chilled-out music...it'd be ace.* (page 84).

- What is your impression of Rory's home when you read this extract. Does it seem welcoming, safe and a bit 'otherworldly'?
- Now study closely the language that Ellie Marney used to create that impression. How does her choice of adjective, adverb, simile and metaphor build this impression?

(b) *Leaves and branches whip me in the face as I bolt along the path. I inhale, and the air is smoky. I barrel around a moonlit corner, vault a pumpkin vine, and look up to see – The Meeting House is on fire...*

Hit a leathery wall, bounce off it, fall back sprawling in the bracken. (pages 345-346).

- What impression has Ellie Marney created in this excerpt?
- Name some of the literary techniques she has used here to create this impression.

6. Read out loud Ray's dinner speech in Chapter 10 and ask students to answer the following questions:

- How do you think you would have reacted if you had been sitting around the fire?

- Did the information about food production seem correct, incorrect or overblown?
- 'I mean does your family still have dinner together, Bo?' (page 106)
 - Why do you think Ray might have asked this question? Do you think he might have been disappointed with the answer?
- 'It takes me a minute to realise that Ray is orating: his voice isn't raised, his manner is low-key and sincere.' (page 107).
 - Study the speech closely and list some of Ray's methods of 'convincing' his audience?
- Why do you think Ray gave this speech and why do you think his audience, most of whom must have heard it all before, is so rapt in what he is saying?

7. Compare the previous speech in Chapter 10 with Ray's speech in Chapter 20.

- Describe how the 'tone' of his speech has changed and the 'mood' that this later speech sets.
- Return to the list of elements common to a cult that was written earlier in the unit and see if you can find anything in this scene that matches the list.

8. 'Ray snorts, shakes his head. 'You never did lose that desire to bow to authority, did you, Bo?'

- What do you think it is about Bo that keeps him from fully 'buying into' Ray's ideas and, as the story progresses, helps him to realise that Ray is delusional?

9. *Grassroots community movements and political action are a critical part of the development of any society.* (page 276)

- What does the term 'grassroots community movement' mean?
- Find an example of one such movement and describe what the problem was and how a community came together to find a solution.
- Choose something you would like to change about your school, local recreational facilities or shopping centre, library or park. Who would you choose to unite with to make this change and how would you go about planning your own 'grassroots movement'?

10. Essay:

Change happens when ordinary people decide to take action – to right a wrong, to resist an injustice, to defend a truth. But first you must recognise wrong and injustice and truth when you see it. (page 276)

The Garden of Eden inhabitants want to rectify environmental wrongs, while Sprog and his friends want to rectify bad council planning. Although vastly different causes, what do both groups share in the way they go about taking action, and how do they differ?

In your opinion, what is the key element that makes the one group successful and the other tragic?

Ellie Marney

Author motivation

'White Night was a labour of love. My parents went through a period of fundamentalist Christianity during my teens, so I wanted to write a book about how you find your ethical path, as a teenager, when the adults around you are acting a bit nuts. It was kind of emotionally hard to write. It was also hard to edit – I have a picture of my dining room table with this long scroll of paper on it, which is what I was using to arrange the edit (because I can't use Scrivener, like a normal person), and everything was sticky-taped and there were big arrows drawn here and there. Many multi-coloured highlighter pens were involved.

'I found the character of Bo provided me with an "in" to the book – he was the outside observer who was drawn into the turmoil, he gave the story perspective.'

—Ellie Marney

About the author

Ellie Marney is a teacher and author of the Every series, No Limits and a contributor to *Begin End Begin: A #LoveOzYA Anthology*. In 2015, her first book *Every Breath* was named as one of the top ten most-borrowed YA books in libraries nationwide. Ellie is an advocate for the #LoveOzYA movement, runs #LoveOzYAbookclub online, is an Ambassador for the Stella Prize Schools Program and speaks regularly at schools and events. Born in Brisbane, Ellie has lived in Indonesia, India and Singapore. Now she lives in a very messy wooden house on ten acres in north-central Victoria with her partner and four sons. *White Night* is her fifth novel for young adults.

Find Ellie online at www.elliemarney.com

Other books

Begin End Begin: A #LoveOzYA Anthology – Harper Collins, 2017

No Limits – self-published online, 2017

Every Move – Allen and Unwin, 2015

Every Word – Allen & Unwin, 2014

Every Breath – Allen & Unwin, 2013

Writing in small press anthologies

Scarlet Stiletto: The Second Cut – Clan Destine Press, Melbourne, 2011

Box of Delights – Aeon Press, Dublin, 2011

Award Winning Australian Writing 2011 – Melbourne Books, Melbourne, 2011

Award Winning Australian Writing 2009 – Melbourne Books, Melbourne, 2009

The Envelope Please 2007 – Be Published (Fellowship of Australian Writers, Victoria), Hurstbridge, 2008

