

Teachers' Notes
by Heather Zubek

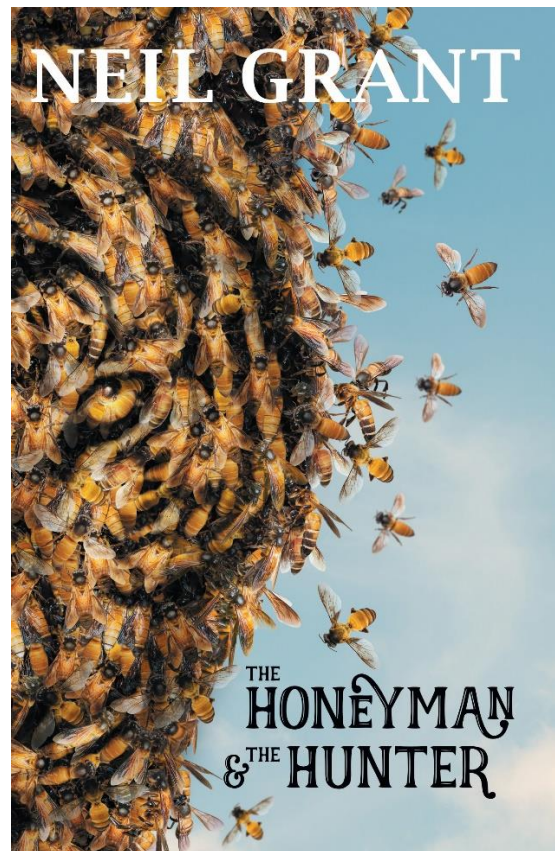
The Honeyman and the Hunter
by
Neil Grant

ISBN 9781760631871

Recommended for ages 14 yrs and older

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Introduction	2
Plot synopsis	2
From the author.....	4
Curriculum alignment	4
Themes	5
Background information & resources	6
Myths & religious practices	6
India & her people	7
Mungo Man	8
Literary references.....	9
Activities and discussion points.....	10
Pre-reading.....	10
Exploring the dreams of the tiger ...	10
Literature & music in the novel.....	10
Imagery	11
Racism	11
Creative responses	11
Discussion topics	11
Extension activities	12
Further reading	12
About the writers	12
Blackline masters.....	13 - 16



83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest, Sydney
NSW 2065
Australia

PO Box 8500
St Leonards
NSW 1590
Australia

ph: (61 2) 8425 0100
fax: (61 2) 9906 2218

info@allenandunwin.com
www.allenandunwin.com

Allen & Unwin PTY LTD
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INTRODUCTION

Sixteen-year-old Rudra Solace is caught in that suffocating space between multiple worlds. Soon he will step into the world outside school with all its expected freedoms and possibilities. He is also caught between cultures, those of coastal Australia and riverine India. Rudra tries to navigate his life with the help of his best mate Maggs and his father's boat hand Wallace, a man who provides background to Rudra's parents' lives. Everything changes when Rudra's *didima*, or grandmother, arrives and his father dredges the past from the 'secret deep'. Rudra begins to learn of his history and the importance of coming home.

SYNOPSIS

Rudra Solace is about to enter Year Eleven at a school on the Central Coast of New South Wales. His Australian father, Cord, is a fisherman and a bully. His Indian mother, Nayna, is a science graduate who is waiting on tables and finding refuge in reading. It is the summer holidays and Rudra spends his time with his best mate Maggs catching waves, avoiding the local racist bully Judge and his cronies and helping his father catch prawns. Fishing is in Rudra's blood. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all fishermen and it is expected that Rudra will follow tradition.

One day Nayna's mother, Rudra's *didima*, appears at the door. She shares Indian delicacies such as *laddoos* and *cha* with Rudra and tells him stories of her childhood home. Rudra continues to work his father's boat, the 'Paper Tiger', with the boat-hand Wallace. Just before dawn one morning, the 'Paper Tiger' gets her nets snagged on something in the bay. Pulling up the nets, the fishermen find something hidden amongst the debris from the 'secret deep'. Only Cord recognises the mysterious object and takes it back to the cabin.

Rudra begins to dream of crazed animals and terror. He decides he must find this object hidden in his father's study. Rudra and Maggs break into the study and uncover a secret hiding place beneath the floorboards. The boys find unopened letters addressed to Nayna from India. As they uncover the mysterious object, Cord steps into the room. The boys run for their lives, Maggs disappearing towards the creek and Rudra heading for a dinghy. Carrying the object with him, Rudra escapes his father's fury by steering the dinghy across the bay, landing on Lion Island.

Once safely on the island, Rudra drifts off to sleep and, once again, dreams of an animal snapping and tearing its prey. He wakes to Wallace on the beach searching for him. It's at this time that Rudra first discusses the idea of returning his father's object to its rightful place.

After being caught in his father's study, Rudra is made to live with Wallace and his *didima*, who is becoming weaker. His *didima* tells him stories of her childhood and childhood home in the Sundarbans region of West Bengal, the now submerged island called Baghchara. She asks Rudra to promise that, once she dies, he will take her ashes back to Baghchara. *Didima* also tells tales of her father the honey-gatherer and of terrible tigers that prey on human flesh.

Soon *Didima* dies. Rudra and Nayna are sitting by her side. Once she is cremated, Nayna and Rudra decide to return her ashes to the Sundarbans.

Rudra shows Nayna an old photograph he took from his father's study. It is of Cord's grandfather displaying a tiger he killed in India. Wallace suggests that the mysterious object found in the bay is actually a tiger skull brought to Australia by Cord's grandfather. Rudra decides there and then to return the tiger skull to its rightful place in India.

Against Cord's wishes, Rudra and his mother travel to India. They meet hotel porter Raj who helps them navigate the problems they face on their journey.

Raj has organised papers for travel and Rudra and Nayna leave Kolkata by train. They arrive by the Bidyadhari River to wait for a ferry to take them across the crocodile-infested river to Gosaba.

Once on the ferry, Rudra befriends a young boy and gives him one of the toy koalas brought from Australia. During the trip, the koala is lost into the river and the boy falls in after it. It is Rudra who jumps in to save him.

In Gosaba village, they meet Aunty Bansari, a loud, forthright woman who will host them for their stay. Aunty Bansari is very aware of what people think and very opinionated, making sure she serves tea in the 'British' way.

During their stay Rudra learns that his Australian great-grandfather shot and killed a tiger at Netidhopani, the same place where his Indian great-grandfather was killed by a tiger. Aunty Bansari believes it was by the same tiger. She also believes that the powerful tiger god Dokkhin Rai will want his revenge for the wrongs committed against him.

Whilst Rudra and Nayna go from house to house visiting relatives and drinking tea, Rudra meets a young girl fishing for prawn seeds.

The following morning Nayna hears the news that her husband Cord has been in an accident at sea. He was taken to a Sydney hospital and has been placed into intensive care. Nayna decides to return home but Rudra stays in order to return the ashes and the skull. Aunty Bansari warns Rudra of all the dangers that lay ahead as can be seen on page 194:

"Return before nightfall, the river is a dangerous place at night, what with tigers and all, and dacoits too, poachers with no regard for human or other life, worshippers of Kali."

Once Rudra is aboard the boat that will take him to return the ashes and the skull, he recognises the girl he saw collecting prawn seeds. Her name is Gitanjali, or Gita. Rudra steers the boat for a while but once the river broadens, Malo, the boatman takes over. Before long Malo spots a flag on a branch, warning them of a tiger attack in the vicinity.

The boat finally comes to the place where Bachchara Island once stood. The tide is high, so everything is submerged. Malo says they are to wait for low tide.

At last the tops of temples can be seen. Gita explains that a whole village lies submerged below them. Rudra pulls out the ashes of his *didima* and tips them into the river. An 'unfortunate breeze' catches the ashes and they cover Rudra. Gita helps Rudra gather them up and pours them into their final resting place.

Rudra and Gita argue over returning the tiger skull to Netidhopani. It is late and to be out on the river at this time is highly dangerous. After handing over all his money to Malo, it is agreed that Rudra can return the tiger skull.

Once at Netidhopani, Rudra and Gita search for a place to leave the skull. Night is falling, and the tigers will soon be out. It is decided that the skull will be returned to the temple.

Once the skull leaves his hands, Rudra sees a tiger step into a clearing nearby. It comes up to Rudra who falls to his knees and bows his head.

Gita wakes Rudra from this nightmare. There was no tiger and the jungle seems at peace.

Gita, Rudra and Malo sleep on the boat overnight. When morning arrives, Gita makes breakfast and afterwards washes her pot in the river – something that Malo believes disrespects Dokkhin Rai.

Once back at the village Gita teaches Rudra how to collect prawn seed. As this is considered women's work, the local boys make fun of him.

That night, a tiger makes his way across the river. Slowly he follows the scent of human flesh into Gita's home. Rudra wakes and flees to the gathering by the river. The villagers warn of a tiger in Gita's home. Rudra runs in and uses an ancient spear to try and kill the tiger. Nothing works as the tiger, with Gita in his jaws, leaps from the house and into the river and is gone.

Rudra returns to the Beamish Hotel in Kolkata. He dreams of a tiger watching and waiting in the shadows. Eventually, after an encounter, the tiger leaves him, the scars from the past healing and disappearing.

Rudra farewells Raj and India. His plane finally lands in Sydney and the first thing Rudra does is visit his father in hospital. It is a brief visit. Rudra explains that the skull has been returned and the curse has been lifted. His father scoffs, turns away and watches television.

Nayna meets Rudra in Gosford and they travel home by car. Things at home are changing. There are photos of Didima and her husband, Rudra's *dadu*, on display as well as a brass elephant-headed Ganesha, the god of letters and writing. Nayna is also applying for jobs.

Rudra and Maggs once again go out surfing. The water is rough and there is an accident. The bully Judge is found unconscious and bleeding in the water. The boys take him to safety and Judge is taken to hospital in an ambulance.

Cord arrives home a changed man. He wants Rudra to take over the fishing business but Rudra has other ideas. Nayna changes the name of Cord's boat from 'Paper Tiger' to 'Bonbibibi'. Rudra, Nayna, Maggs and Wallace take the boat out into the ocean to scatter some of Didima's remaining ashes. Things are changing, for the better.

FROM THE AUTHOR

'My story is deeply entwined with that of India and its people. My mum, gran and grandad, and my great gran were all born in India (although my grandad was born in Lahore, which is now Pakistan). When my gran died in 1994, I made my first trip to India, a two-month odyssey between Poona (the birthplace of my gran) and Golmuri (the birthplace of my mum). The next trip was supposed to be to Ladakh, a place that I'd read about during my first visit, but the trip ended up being a five-month wander through northern India and into Nepal. My third novel, *The Ink Bridge*, was completed, after a trip to Afghanistan, in the small Tibetan refugee community of Bir in Himachal Pradesh. So, I have a strong connection to India.

Part of my reasons for writing this book are bound up in my mother's story. At 14, she left the only home she had known and travelled to England. She never returned to India. I think she spent her whole life looking for belonging. Her story is partly reflected in Didima's story who left her island of Baghchara, a place that ceased to exist. My mum did get to go home in the end. In 2017, we spread her ashes in the garden of her childhood home in Golmuri, Jarkhand.

My grandad was a hunter (our family shame). I grew up in Glasgow with the skins of leopards and a bear and (most grotesquely) the feet of elephants. My Uncle Al (my gran's brother) wrote of the hunting trips with my grandad so I have well-written first-person accounts of their exploits. While I hated that the gentle grandad I knew had killed these animals, I have grown to accept this was a different time with different rules. In his defence, most of the animals he killed were either preying on people or animals (but that seems a poor justification). I guess, in some way, I wanted to express my feelings about this without writing about it directly.

My other impetus was thinking about what it means to be an immigrant in this country, as most of us are. No one ever asks me where I am from; though I was born in Scotland. Yet people of colour are often asked where they are from. A friend's husband is Australian-born Chinese (gold rush era!) and is continually asked. How long does it take to belong? I think Australia is struggling at the moment with its identity and who gets to call themselves Australian. The anti-Indian violence of 2008-10 unearthed a repulsive side of our country that I think needs to be addressed. This is Rudra's world.'

CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

The Honeyman and the Hunter is best studied in middle to late secondary years (Years 9 to 12). It's literary style, inter-cultural settings and themes make it suitable for study in English, Modern History and Ancient History.

ENGLISH

- Analysing and evaluating how similar themes, ideas or concepts are treated in different texts (ACEEN043)

Literature

- the degree to which individual points of view, experiences and contexts shape responses to texts (ACELR001)
- the use of figurative language and rhetorical devices to represent concepts and shape arguments, for example, symbolism, metonymy, types of irony, patterns of imagery (ACELR009)
- the ways in which texts are influenced by other texts and by contexts (ACELR019)
- the ways in which texts resemble and refer to other texts, for example, through parody, imitation, appropriation and transformation, and the ways in which adaptations of earlier texts allow new insights into original texts (ACELR024)
- the power of language to represent ideas, events and people in particular ways (ACELR038)
- the ways in which authors represent Australian culture, place and identity both to Australians and the wider world. (ACELR040)
- how literature reflects cultural change and difference (ACELR053)
- how texts in different literary forms, mediums or traditions are the same or different (ACELR055)

MODERN HISTORY

The Age of Imperialism 1848 – 1914

- The key ideas of the 'imperial age' including nationalism, the glorification of 'empire' and the 'Christian mission' (ACHMH044)
- With particular reference to ONE or more colonies, the methods and motivations of the colonisers; the experiences and responses of the colonised people; and the changes that occurred within the colony/colonies as part of imperial expansion (ACHMH045)

ANCIENT HISTORY

Beliefs, rituals and funerary practices

- The different beliefs, rituals and funerary practices of Ancient India, including:
- the nature of the sources for beliefs, rituals and funerary practices (ACHAH140)
- the dominant beliefs and rituals (ACHAH141)
- the influence and significance of beliefs and rituals (ACHAH142)
- attitudes to and beliefs about death, and the concept of an afterlife (ACHAH143)
- funerary practices (burial sites, forms of burial, ceremonies) and their relationship to religious beliefs and social status. (ACHAH144)

THEMES

INDIA AND AUSTRALIA

Rudra has grown up in a typical Australian environment, living on the coast, fishing, surfing and hanging out with his mates. He also feels the pull of another world, another culture: that of India. Right from his birth, his mother Nayna has taught Rudra the rhymes, stories and superstitions of her home. India is in his blood.

- Using a [Venn Diagram](#) write the differences and similarities found in the book regarding life on the Central Coast of NSW and life in the Sundarbans.

BELONGING/IDENTITY

The theme of belonging is strong throughout *The Honeyman and the Hunter*. Where does Rudra belong, in Australia or India? Nayna's struggle to belong to her new country and home. Her identity as an Indian woman evolves once she attends university and then is married. Didima's longing to return to her childhood home where she belonged. Cord's sense of belonging and identity are shattered once he learns he can no longer fish.

- Can you identify any other character who desires to belong?

RETURNING HOME

Many of the characters in *The Honeyman and the Hunter* are 'returning home' in one form or another. Didima's wish that her ashes are returned to her childhood home; the tiger skull needs to return home in order for Rudra's nightmares to stop; and Rudra returns to his 'cultural' home in India. There are stories of prawns knowing their place of origin and how mutton birds fly thousands of kilometres to return home. Raj views his home as something foreign now that he has matured and experienced the 'outside world' and Gita yearns to leave home in order to learn and grow.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

It would be of interest for the teacher to introduce students to the stories of Indian culture and mythology.

MYTHS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Most Indian myths and legends are taken from two poems, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. They are also taken from ancient Hindu texts, the *Puranas*.

Kali is a Hindu goddess that is a destroyer of evil forces. She is seen as the divine protector and is mainly portrayed standing or dancing on the Hindu god Shiva. Kali is described as being black in colour but is often depicted as blue in Indian art. Her eyes are red through intoxication and rage, her hair is dishevelled and there are fangs in her mouth. Her tongue is often portrayed as red and long.

The people of Sunderbans worship the Tiger as the Lord of the South. The Tiger owns all the land and wealth of the Sunderbans and shares it with Bonbibi. Both Hindus and Muslims gather at a common site to worship the Tiger.

<http://www.sanctuaryasia.com/sanctuary-blog/Tribes-That-Worship-The-Tiger.html>

Bonbibi, sometimes spelt Banbibi, is the lady of the forest. She is the guardian spirit worshipped by both the Hindu and Muslim faith of the Sundarbans. She is called upon by the honey-gatherers and woodcutters to protect them from tigers as they work in the forest. It is believed that the demon king, Dokkhin Rai, is the enemy of Bonbibi that appears in the disguise of a tiger. The Dokkhin Rai attacks humans.

<http://talkingmyths.com/the-story-of-bonbibi/>

Dokkhin Rai or Dakshin Rai, is the ruler of beasts and demons in the Sundarbans in India and in Bangladesh. He is regarded as the overall ruler of the Sundarbans. Every new moon, the ruler is appeased with animal sacrifices. Dokkhin Rai also likes music and the local tribes try to appease him by dancing and singing. Some tribesmen bind a mask of Dokkhin Rai to the back of their heads hoping to scare away any tigers in the forest.

Dukhe, from the word *Dukkho* meaning sadness, was a young boy who lived with his widowed mother. His uncle Dhona lured him into working as a honey-collector for him. Dokkhin Rai saw Dukhe and wanted to eat him. Dokkhin Rai promised Dhona seven boats filled with honey and wax in return for Dukhe. The uncle left the boy on the banks of the river and sailed off. Just as Dukhe was about to be eaten by Dokkhin Rai, he called out to Bonbibi for help. She rescued him and sent her twin brother Shah Jongoli to teach Dokkhin Rai a lesson by

calling Bonbibi 'mother'. After hearing this story, villagers are only to enter the neighbouring forests with 'pure hearts and minds' and 'empty minds'. They are only to take from the forest what they need to survive.

From: *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans*, by Annu Jalais. Routledge Chapman & Hal, 2009.

Shukra is the Evening Star or Venus. In Sanskrit, the word means 'lucid, clear, bright'.

<http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Shukra>

Ganges River

The great river of northern India, it is officially known as Ganga in Hindi but it is known around the world as the Ganges. It is the holy river of Hinduism and is personified as the goddess Ganga. Hindus bathe in the river paying homage to their ancestors and gods by cupping the water in their hands, lifting it up and allowing it to fall back into the river. Worshippers place flowers and rose petals and light floating candles for the river. Hindus believe that by bathing in the Ganges, their sin is removed. The Ganges rises in the Himalayas and empties into the Bay of Bengal supporting hundreds of millions of people.

<https://www.ancient.eu/Ganges/>

Ashvamedha is the sacrifice of a horse (p. 174). Also spelt *ashwamedha*, it is the grandest Vedic religious rite of ancient India. It is a ceremony performed by the king to celebrate his rule. The horse was said to symbolise the Sun in its journey over the world and consequently the power of the king over the Earth.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/ashvamedha>

Puja or Pooja, is a prayer ritual performed by Hindus. It is a devotional worship to one or more gods, a host or guest or to celebrate an event.

Indian Myths

<http://talkingmyths.com/>

8 Fascinating Indian Myths and Legends

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/india/articles/8-fascinating-indian-myths-and-legends/>

INDIA AND HER PEOPLE

Who are the honey gatherers?

The poor fishermen and villagers around Bangladesh's Sundarban region have been collecting wild honey every year for generations. The Sundarbans is the largest area of mangrove forests in the world and one of the most treacherous. Between April and June, the honey gatherers head into the forest to earn enough money to repair their fishing boats and repay any debts. Honey gathering is perhaps one of the most dangerous jobs in the world.

The honey gatherers must face man eating tigers, poisonous snakes, crocodiles and pirates. It is believed that over 80 people are killed by tigers each year in the Sundarbans.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/13556336>

Sundarbans

Formerly known as Sunderbunds, the Sundarbans is a large tract of forest and swamp in north-eastern India and southern Bangladesh. It is a network of estuaries, tidal rivers and creeks enclosing flat, forested and marshy islands. The total area of the Sundarbans is approximately 10,000 square kilometres. A Sundarbans Tiger Reserve was created in 1973 and it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Sundarbans>

Adivasis

Adivasis are the earliest inhabitants of India and have a deep relationship with forests. Their economy depends on what they collect from the forest and they are often seen as the protectors of the forests.

<http://living-farms.org/2015/11/13/10-things-you-did-not-know-about-ativasis-in-india/>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Adivasi>

Chai

Chai or Cha is a word that is used for tea in India. It is a sweet milky tea brewed with black tea leaves with added spices such as cardamom, cloves and pepper. It is also known as Masala Chai or Spiced Tea. Chai is hundreds of years old and the most loved beverage of India. In West Bengal and Bangladesh, the tea brew is called Cha.

[A [recipe](#) is included with the blackline masters at the end of these notes.]

Coconut Ladoo

Also known as Laddu. They are round-shaped sweets from India made from flour, ghee/butter or oil and sugar. Other ingredients such as chopped nuts, dried raisins or coconut can be added. They are often served during festive or religious occasions. Coconut ladoo were often given to travellers or warriors as a symbol of good luck.

[A [recipe](#) is included with the blackline masters at the end of these notes.]

For more information on the variety of **Indian food** mentioned in the book, visit <https://www.harighotra.co.uk/indian-recipes>. There are several recipes as well as videos on how to create authentic Indian food.

MUNGO MAN

Lake Mungo, in south west New South Wales, was once a lake of fresh water filled with wild life. Over 15,000 years ago, it dried up leaving a landscape looking like the surface of the moon. In 1974 a rainstorm eroded some of the sand leaving the remains of a skeleton visible. A geologist, studying the rocks nearby, came across the skeleton and knew it was something special. Archaeologists from the Australian National University in Canberra excavated the find and removed it for more study. They called the skeleton 'Mungo Man'.

The local Indigenous people believed that 'Mungo Man' wanted to be found. They believed that he wanted the world to understand how long Indigenous people had been living on this continent.

Scientists who studied Mungo Man believe that he roamed the area over 42,000 years ago. Not only that, they found that he and his tribesmen had culture, a complex language, sophisticated tools and ritualised ceremonies.

The local Indigenous groups were upset with the removal of Mungo Man. They believe that ancestors should remain on their own land and the present people should be their custodians. The local people fought to bring Mungo Man home where he belonged.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-12/mungo-man-what-to-do-next-with-australias-oldest-remains/9371038>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-17/mungo-man-returned-to-ancestral-home/9159840>

LITERARY REFERENCES IN *THE HONEYMAN AND THE HUNTER*

A variety of literature is mentioned in the book. At the end of these notes, the information below is reproduced as a [handout](#) for students.

'The Reed Flutes Song' by Rumi

Rumi was a 13th century mystic and poet. His work has been translated into many languages. He has been described as the world's most popular poet. Rumi's poetry now forms the basis of many classical Iranian and Afghan musical pieces.

*Listen to the story told by the reed,
of being separated.
"Since I was cut from the reed bed,
I have made this crying sound.
Anyone apart from someone he loves
understands what I say.
Anyone pulled from a source
longs to go back.
At any gathering I am there,
mingling in the laughing and grieving,
a friend to each, but few
will hear the secrets hidden
within the notes. No ears for that.
Body flowing out of spirit,
spirit up from body: no concealing
that mixing. But it's not given us
to see the soul. The reed flute
is fire, not wind. Be that empty."
Hear the love fire tangled
in the reed notes, as bewilderment
melts into wine. The reed is a friend
to all who want the fabric torn
and drawn away. The reed is hurt*

*and salve combining. Intimacy
and longing for intimacy, one
song. A disastrous surrender
and a fine love, together. The one
who secretly hears this is senseless.
A tongue has one customer, the ear.
A sugarcane flute has such effect
because it was able to make sugar
in the reed bed. The sound it makes
is for everyone. Days full of wanting,
let them go by without worrying
that they do. Stay where you are
inside such a pure, hollow note.
Every thirst gets satisfied except
that of these fish, the mystics,
who swim a vast ocean of grace
still somehow longing for it!
No one lives in that without
being nourished every day.
But if someone doesn't want to hear
the song of the reed flute,
it's best to cut conversation
short, say good-bye, and leave.*

<https://onbeing.org/poetry/song-of-the-reed/>

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian writer best known for his work in English fiction. Born in Calcutta in 1956, Ghosh studied at Oxford University. Today, the writer lives in New York.

The Hungry Tide is set in the Sundarbans. It tells the story of three people from different worlds. The Morichjhanpi massacre in 1978-79, when thousands of Bengali refugees were forcibly evicted from the area, provides the background to the story.

Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali poet, musician and artist from India. In 1913, he became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is sometimes referred to as the 'Bard of Bengal'.

Gitanjali is a collection of poems published in 1910.

ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM

PRE-READING

Examine the cover of the book.

- From this cover, what do you think the story is about? Make predictions briefly and then revisit them once the book has been read.
- Where do you think the story is set? Why?
- Study the fonts that have been used on the cover. Give reasons for the placement, the colour and type of font used. Why is the author's name in bold at the top of the cover?

Read the quote from *Stray Birds* by Rabindranath Tagore at the beginning of the book.

- What does this quote mean?
- How do you think it might relate to the story of the book?
- Once you have read the book, revisit your response. Would you change it? If so, how?

Find the maps on page 2 and page 142.

- Locate each map on Google Maps or Google Earth.
- What are the similarities? Differences?
- Why do you think the author chose the Sundarbans as a setting for the story?

EXPLORING THE DREAMS OF THE TIGER

The tiger in *The Honeyman and the Hunter* is used as a metaphor.

- For what do you think?

Read the *italicised* text on page 62 and consider the following:

- What is the animal being described?
- Why is this animal visiting Rudra in his dream?
- What is behind this dream?
- Is this dream a premonition? How do you know?

Read Didima's story of Dokkhin Rai starting on page 99 and ending with 'he left for Kolkata,' on page 103.

- Write a short textual analysis of this passage
- Could this be a type of parable? If so, what lessons are we to learn from it?

Read about the appearance of the tiger from 'He turns and hears the day crack open,' halfway down page 207 to 'Rudra falls into the abyss,' on page 208.

- How is this appearance of the tiger different to the other appearances?
- What does this appearance mean to Rudra? Why has the tiger appeared to him?
- How differently does the author write about this appearance of the tiger to all the others in the book?

LITERATURE AND MUSIC OF THE HONEYMAN AND THE HUNTER

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh is given to Rudra by his mother before they travel to India. She says it is a metaphor for his journey.

- Read the synopsis of *The Hungry Tide* [see handout at end of these notes] and discuss how it could be a metaphor. Can you find any similarities in the stories?

Read 'The Reed Flutes Song' by Rumi [see handout at end of these notes]. Didima says that Rumi wrote this poem as he longed for his homeland.

- Write an analysis of the poem.
- Research the life and works of Rumi.

Read the English version of *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore

- Why did Malo give this book to Rudra?

Rudra listens to *Porcelina of the Vast Oceans* by Smashing Pumpkins.

- Why did the author choose this piece of music as an accompaniment to the story?

IMAGERY

Read the description of Rudra and Nayna's arrival at Sealdah Station from 'Inside, the station is chaotic,' to 'before they catch the early train.' (p. 164)

- The word 'swarm' is used frequently, as is 'swooping'. Why do you think the author chose these words to describe the activity at the station?
- The author has used all senses in the description of this station. Give examples.
- Has the author written this work from experience? Do you think he has travelled through India? Give reasons for your answer.

RACISM

Nearly all the characters face some form of racism.

- As you read the book, find examples of this racism.
- What racist terms can you find in the story?

CREATIVE RESPONSES

Didima was not given a 'proper funeral'.

- Write a eulogy for her.

Research the life and work of Kadambini Ganguly.

- Why would Nayna have Kadambini as her hero?

Tigers aren't the only animal to be feared in the Sundarbans. Crocodiles have been known to kill the local villagers.

- How would Rudra's dreams change if it were a crocodile that stalked him? Rewrite one of the dream sequences using a crocodile instead of a tiger.
- Re-create the book cover using the image of a crocodile.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 'We are made from the soil of our birthplace, Rudra. It is there we must return when everything else is done.' p. 91
- 'There is an art in his silence. It means something.' p. 81
- 'But sometimes when the problem is so hard the solution is a nut hidden inside a bitter fruit.' p. 112
- 'To him India is just a story, a phantom pain where a limb never grew. India, gone before it was there.' p. 148
- 'It is important to know the little pieces that make you up.' p. 150.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Read *The Hungry Tide* and compare and contrast the story with that of *The Honeyman and the Hunter*.
- Create a background playlist for the reading of *The Honeyman and the Hunter*.
- Research the importance of the Ganges in the burial rituals of the Hindus.

FURTHER READING

OTHER NOVELS BY NEIL GRANT

The Ink Bridge. Allen & Unwin, 2012

Indo Dreaming. Allen & Unwin, 2005

Rhino Chasers. Allen & Unwin, 2002

NOVELS BY OTHER AUTHORS

For older teenagers

Under the Moonlit Sky by Nav K Gill. Dundurn Press, Canada, 2010
A young Canadian girl must return to India to fulfil her father's wishes.

For younger teenagers and upper primary readers

Kalpana's Dream by Judith Clarke. Allen & Unwin, 2004
When Neema's great-grandmother Kalpana leaves her village in India to visit her family in Australia, Neema is not sure how to be friends with her.

The Best Day of My Life by Deborah Ellis. Allen & Unwin, 2012
A young Indian girl tries to survive by herself on the streets of Kolkata.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

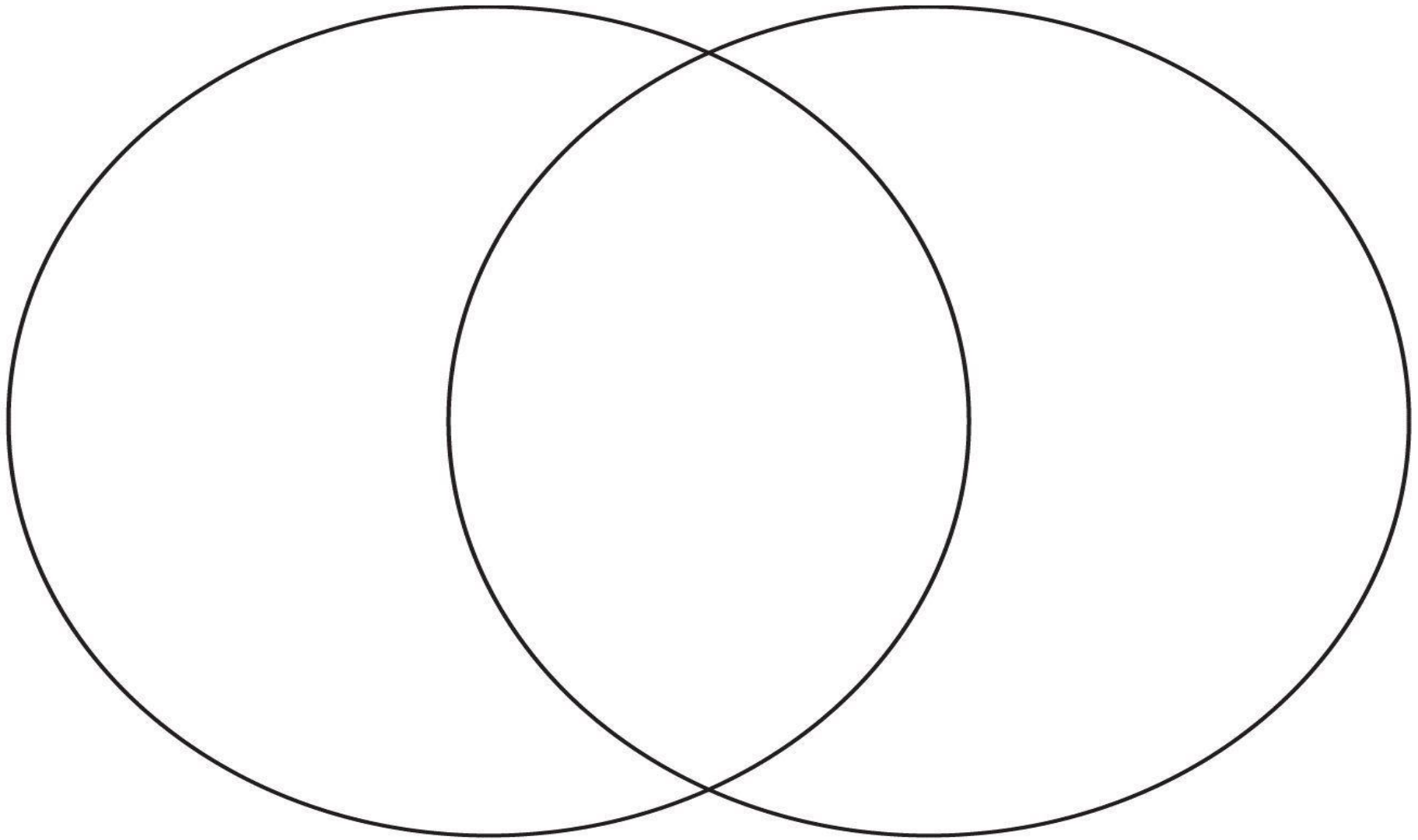
NEIL GRANT

Neil Grant was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in the Year of the Fire Horse. He learnt to speak Australian at the age of 13 when he migrated to Melbourne with his family. He finished high school at the International School of Kuala Lumpur in 1985 and spent the next 14 years working on his resumé and travelling to places such as Israel, Yugoslavia, India, Nepal, Thailand, Greece, Italy, the UK and Tasmania. In 2000 he graduated from RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing course and had his first novel (*Rhino Chasers*) accepted by Allen & Unwin. He travelled through Indonesia for two months researching his second novel *Indo Dreaming*, which was published by Allen & Unwin in 2005. In 2009, he visited Afghanistan to research *The Ink Bridge* – a novel about asylum seekers and friendship. His latest novel is based partly in India – the birthplace of his mother.

HEATHER ZUBEK

Heather Zubek has been a primary school teacher, library teacher, freelance writer and storyteller for many years. Heather believes in the transformative power of story. She believes that one book has the power to help change the world. At present, Heather is teaching gifted students and working as a freelance writer specialising in children's literature, travel and community development. She has also created Teachers Notes for other Allen & Unwin publications. Heather has published two teacher resource books through Ready-Ed Publications: *Global Focus: Making a Difference in the World* and *Cultures, Places and Resources in Developing Countries*.

Life on the Central Coast of NSW vs Life in the Sundarbans



Simple Chai Tea Recipe

Ingredients

- 8 cardamom seeds
- 8 cloves
- 4 black peppercorns
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1 2cm piece fresh ginger, sliced
- 2 cups whole milk
- 4 bags black tea (such as Darjeeling)
- 8 teaspoons sugar or more to taste

Instructions

1. Place the cardamom, cloves, and peppercorns in a resealable plastic bag and crush with a heavy skillet.
2. Place the crushed spices in a medium saucepan, along with the cinnamon sticks, ginger, milk, and 2 cups water; bring to a boil. Remove from heat, add the tea bags, cover, and let steep for 10 minutes.
3. Strain into cups. To each cup, add 2 teaspoons sugar or more, to taste.

<https://www.realsimple.com/food-recipes/browse-all-recipes/easy-chai-tea-recipe>

Coconut Ladoo

Also known as Laddu. They are round-shaped sweets from India made from flour, ghee/butter or oil and sugar. Other ingredients such as chopped nuts, dried raisins or coconut can be added. They are often served during festive or religious occasions. Coconut ladoo were often given to travellers or warriors as a symbol of good luck.

Ingredients

- 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups desiccated coconut (plus extra for coating)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar
- 2 tsp ghee
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp cardamom powder

Instructions

4. First take a large pan and sauté the coconut until it is slightly warm to touch. This basically removes excess moisture from the coconut. But take care to not change the colour of the coconut.
5. Now add the milk and sugar and mix well. Stir at regular intervals and continue to cook in medium low flame until the mixture becomes dry.
6. Now add the ghee and give a quick mix. Add the cardamom powder and mix well. Cook until the mixture turns slightly sticky and starts to bind with itself.
7. Turn off the flame and let it cool down until it is cold enough to touch. Grease your palm with more ghee and roll out the coconut mixture into balls. Roll the coconut ladoos into some more desiccated coconut. Leave it to cool completely to room temperature.

<https://revisfoodography.com/2017/04/coconut-ladoo/>

LITERARY REFERENCES IN *THE HONEYMAN AND THE HUNTER*

'The Reed Flutes Song' by Rumi

Rumi was a 13th century mystic and poet. His work has been translated into many languages. He has been described as the world's most popular poet. Rumi's poetry now forms the basis of many classical Iranian and Afghan musical pieces.

*Listen to the story told by the reed,
of being separated.
"Since I was cut from the reed bed,
I have made this crying sound.
Anyone apart from someone he loves
understands what I say.
Anyone pulled from a source
longs to go back.
At any gathering I am there,
mingling in the laughing and grieving,
a friend to each, but few
will hear the secrets hidden
within the notes. No ears for that.
Body flowing out of spirit,
spirit up from body: no concealing
that mixing. But it's not given us
to see the soul. The reed flute
is fire, not wind. Be that empty."
Hear the love fire tangled
in the reed notes, as bewilderment
melts into wine. The reed is a friend
to all who want the fabric torn
and drawn away. The reed is hurt*

*and salve combining. Intimacy
and longing for intimacy, one
song. A disastrous surrender
and a fine love, together. The one
who secretly hears this is senseless.
A tongue has one customer, the ear.
A sugarcane flute has such effect
because it was able to make sugar
in the reed bed. The sound it makes
is for everyone. Days full of wanting,
let them go by without worrying
that they do. Stay where you are
inside such a pure, hollow note.
Every thirst gets satisfied except
that of these fish, the mystics,
who swim a vast ocean of grace
still somehow longing for it!
No one lives in that without
being nourished every day.
But if someone doesn't want to hear
the song of the reed flute,
it's best to cut conversation
short, say good-bye, and leave*

<https://onbeing.org/poetry/song-of-the-reed/>

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian writer best known for his work in English fiction. Born in Calcutta in 1956, Ghosh studied at Oxford University. Today, the writer lives in New York.

The Hungry Tide is set in the Sundarbans. It tells the story of three people from different worlds. The Morichjhanpi massacre in 1978-79, when thousands of Bengali refugees were forcibly evicted from the area, provides the background to the story.

Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali poet, musician and artist from India. In 1913, he became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is sometimes referred to as the 'Bard of Bengal'.

Gitanjali is a collection of poems published in 1910.