



Teachers' Notes for Michael Gerard Bauer's Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs

OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	YA Fiction
Title	Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs
Author	Michael Gerard Bauer
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Introduction

Ishmael joins Scobie, Prindabel, Bill and the Razzman for another year at St Daniel's, and with his father's old band reforming and Miss Tarango on a mission to teach love poetry, there's music and romance in the air. But can Ishmael stand up to the school bully, Barry Bagsley, overcome Ishmael Leseur's Syndrome and win the heart of Kelly Faulkner? Luckily, his best mate Razza – the self-appointed social worker for love – has a 'wicked plan'.

What could possibly go wrong?

About the Author

Michael Gerard Bauer was born in Brisbane. He taught at schools in the Brisbane–Ipswich region before resigning from full-time teaching to pursue his dream of being a published writer. *The Running Man* was winner of the CBCA Book of the Year (Older Readers) award, and shortlisted in both the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards in 2005. It was also the winner of the *Courier Mail* Readers' Choice Award and it was shortlisted for the *Courier Mail* Book of the Year for Younger Readers Award. In 2006 *The Running Man* was shortlisted for the SA Festival Awards for Literature. In 2008 it won the prestigious German literature prize, the *Katholischer Kinder- und Jugendbuchpreis* and was shortlisted for the *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* readers' section award.

Michael's second book, *Don't Call Me Ishmael!*, was shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year Awards and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards in 2007, selected for 'The White Ravens 2007' exhibition at the Bologna Book Fair, and won its category in the Children's Peace Literature Award in 2007 and the SA Festival Awards for Literature in 2008.

His latest book is *Dinosaur Knights*, an exciting time-slip fantasy for younger readers.

Note on the Text

Michael Gerard Bauer's second Ishmael book is written as a first-person narrative from the point of view of Ishmael. The writing is witty and clever, with much verbal humour in the exchanges between the characters, especially Ishmael and the boys in the debating team, where in spite of the lack of clues at times, the reader is in no doubt as to who is speaking. The point of view emphasises the personal, although characters such as Razza develop in such a

way that the first-person narrative is not always noticeable. The structure of short episodes rather than chapters, which often have a punch line or a joke that relates back to the title, is particularly interesting.

Before Reading the Text

Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs is the sequel to *Don't Call Me Ishmael!* If you haven't already read this, you may like to familiarise yourself with what happens.

Reading the Text

Track 1: Collision Course (1–6)

Class Discussion: first impressions

What are your immediate thoughts about the novel? What do you think the story will be about? What evidence supports this? Share your initial impression of Ishmael. Do you think he has the makings of a good protagonist? Is he a recognisable character?

Research Task: investigating Shakespeare

- 1) Find out where the lines Scobie and Miss Tarango quote to each other come from (page 29) and look at them in their original context. Work out the speaker's meaning and translate it into modern-day English.
- 2) Who is William Shakespeare? Using the Internet, find out what you can about the famous playwright and his works, including his poetry. Be prepared to engage in a class discussion on whether or not you think Shakespeare's work is relevant in a classroom today. This discussion could also focus on the merits of studying modern literature versus those of studying the classic texts. Consider what makes a classic text. Do you think the Ishmael books could ever be considered classics? Who decides whether or not a book becomes a classic?

Literacy Component: keeping a journal

Start a response journal to *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*. To begin, include a character chart where you map characters' relationships and keep a record of everyone in the story, and start a *word bank* where you keep a record of unfamiliar words you encounter in the text. As you progress through the novel, take note of your impressions and observations. You could include chapter summaries, comments on things that interest you, what you think is

successful or what you think doesn't work, speculations about the plot, thoughts on characterisation etc.

Track 2: Dead Toad Society blues (7–11)

Class Discussion: to be or not to be? Does poetry have a place in modern society?

- 1) Many people view poetry as an inaccessible form of literature, and it is not generally regarded as popular reading material. Why do you think this is? What are your own views on poetry as a writing form? Do you read poetry for fun or know anyone who does? Do you have a favourite poet or are you familiar with a particular poet's work? Do you think poetry has a place in modern society? Like Miss Tarango in the book, it always seems to be teachers and adults lauding poetry. Do you think you have to be a certain age to appreciate it?
- 2) How would you define a poem? Does a poem have to rhyme? Brainstorm words you associate with poetry.

Research Task: a poem a day

See if you can find an example of poetry being used daily. Analyse this example, stating why you think this particular form has been used and if in your opinion it is successful.

Clue: Pay attention to advertisements, signs and slogans. Listen to the radio.

Literacy Component: writing sonnets

On page 61 Miss Tarango provides an explanation on how to write a sonnet. Using this guide, write your own sonnet on a subject of your choice. To get a feel for the form, you might like to read a few sonnets before you begin. Visit <www.sonnets.org> to find examples and more detailed explanations on sonnet writing.

Track 3: Each and every line (12–17)

Class Discussion: is poetry the new hug?

- 1) What is your opinion of Razza's poem? Do you think writing a poem is a good way of expressing your affection? Would you be impressed if someone wrote you a poem? Why do you think poetry is regarded as a romantic form of literature?
- 2) In general, do you prefer written or spoken communication? Are you more inclined to text someone or email them then call them? What effects, if any, do you think this type of convenient communication has on our social skills?

Research Task: creating a newspaper article

Imagine you write for a newspaper. Someone like Razza or Ishmael has written to the editor asking advice on impressing the person he likes. Your task is to respond to them. You can choose to write an advice column instructing them on how to proceed or you may like to write a feature article about dating dilemmas. In order to create a piece suitable for print, select an existing article from your local newspaper and analyse the structure, language, content and heading. Drawing on this information, construct a plan for your own article. Make sure you present your final piece in newspaper format and attach your newspaper analysis that demonstrates your understanding of reporting techniques and shows how you have applied them in your own article. For more information to help prepare your article visit <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/handouts/broadcast_news/news_article_formula.cfm>.

Literacy Component: update your journal!

Make sure you continue to write in your journal. These observations and summaries will be useful when it comes to writing an evaluation piece on *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*.

Track 4: Pain (18–22)

Class Discussion: bullies in fiction and in real life

- 1) Characters in literature often reflect real-life counterparts, and bullies have and will continue to feature in fiction as long as they exist in our world. In this sense, fiction, like non-fiction, is an important historical artefact as it preserves the sentiments of a particular time period. Bullying is a long-term problem that shows no sign of abating. Can you think of any famous fictional bullies that illustrate this problem's longevity? Why do you think bullying recurs in each generation? What do you think motivates people to bully? Do you think it's possible for there to be a society free from bullying, or do you believe it is part of human nature?
- 2) Do you think Barry Bagsley is an accurate representation of a bully? Do Ishmael and his friends deal with Barry in an appropriate way? Do books like this raise awareness and even convince people to change their behaviour? Do you think a bully would recognise aspects of themselves in fictional characters?
- 3) Barry Bagsley might be considered Ishmael's nemesis. Who are your favourite villains in literature?

Research Task: design a T-shirt

Choose something you are interested in and see if there is an international day to celebrate (if there isn't, you might like to nominate your own day). Design a logo for a T-shirt promoting

your day. Re-read the description of Prindabel's for ideas. Present your final design on a poster advertising the shirt for sale. You might like to use this website to get started <<http://www.designatshirtonline.com/>>.

Literacy Component: characterisation

A common misconception in our society is that boys do not have caring relationships. Why do you think this is? Describe how this impression is challenged in these chapters. Do you think the author has presented believable friendships?

Track 5: Memory sea (23–27)

Class Discussion:

- 1) Why is debating important to Ishmael and his friends? Though Ishmael is the book's protagonist, the author hasn't made him the star of the debating team. Why do you think this is? Why is debating important outside of the book (consider individual and social implications)?
- 2) What do you know about debating? Do you know how to construct an argument; do you know how a formal debate proceeds etc.? As a class, brainstorm all the things pertinent to a debate and create a debating plan that will aid you when you come to write your own.

Research task: arguing your case

Choose a team of three in preparation for a debate. Your teacher will assign a debating topic to your group and inform you if you will be arguing the affirmative or the negative. Once this is done nominate your first, second and third speakers. For help in outlining your talk visit this very helpful website <http://www.actdu.org.au/archives/actein_site/basicskills.html>. You need to convince your classmates of your argument as they will be your judges.

Literacy Component: writing definitions

Prue diagnoses her and Ishmael's dad with Philopatridomania, a condition where someone suffers extreme nostalgia. Invent your own condition and, pretending you are an expert on the subject, write up a definition explaining the causes and symptoms.

Track 6: All the time (28–32)

Class Discussion: framing devices

By now you would have noticed that a group of events is framed by the lyrics of a song. What do you think is the significance of this? Have you encountered a similar device in other books

you have read? What role do lyrics play in relation to the text? (E.g. do they signpost, echo themes and sentiments, or do you find them irrelevant?)

Literacy Component: the art of lyric writing

Choose a favourite song and analyse the structure, taking note of any stylistic devices the songwriter has used. Drawing on this analysis, write your own song lyrics about something that is happening in your life. If you play an instrument, you may like to compose music for your lyrics.

Track 7: Bad day for angels (33–38)

Class Discussion: the sacred diary

- 1) Do you think Ishmael was wrong for looking in Kelly's diary? What does a diary symbolise? What makes them sacred objects? Do you think it takes a certain type of person to maintain a diary? What is a diary's purpose?
- 2) Why is it okay to read – and even publish – the diary of a deceased person? Can you think of any famous diaries? Would you agree to have your diary published?
- 3) Why do people write fiction in diary format? Have you read any books in this style and, if so, do you like this approach?

Research Task: investigating famous diaries

Visit your library and find a diary that has been published. Research the author and background of the diary and write a short review in response, describing the purpose of publication and your evaluation of the diary's contribution to literature (e.g. is it culturally or historically important?).

Literacy Component: diary writing

Choose a character in the novel and write a diary entry from their perspective about an event that occurs. Be creative but use the text as a guide in creating your chosen character's voice.

Track 8: The time has come (39–45)

Class Discussion: brainstorming ideas for a public event

Teamwork is demonstrated in the novel in the combined effort that brings the concert together at the end. Some of the ideas that Mr Barker brings to the group effort are entrepreneurial and have benefits for both the band and the school community. A class discussion could centre on organising the next school event, using the examples of

cooperation given in the book (e.g. the art department and art students) and using every resource available to make the most of the event. Some time could also be given to understanding the amount of work that is required to organise a big public event by brainstorming to-do lists.

Research Task: event planning

Imagine you are an event planner. Come up with a great idea for an event and research all the information you need to put it on. Pretend you are trying to convince others that this event should take place, and in the form of a project book write up a proposal including all of your research. For ideas and information on how to plan an event visit the following websites:

<http://www.ideacenter.org/clubs/resources_event.php>

<<http://www.icbl.org/youth/action/plan.html>>

<<http://h10025.www1.hp.com/ewfrf/wc/acHowto?lc=en&dlc=&cc=us&extcat=makeadifference&projid=c00696233>>.

Literacy Component: making lists

Using Ishmael's top ten list as a guide, make your own list of the top ten highlights of your year so far.

Track 9: The very best of everything (46–48)

Class Discussion: final impressions

Now that you have finished the book, what are your opinions and judgments? Are you satisfied? Did it meet your expectations? Was it believable? How does it compare with other books you have read? Would you recommend it to your friends? In your opinion, is it a memorable book?

After Reading the Text

Literacy Component: reviewing the book

Write a book review of *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs* analysing the book's merit. You may like to find examples of book reviews to study the structure. When evaluating *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs* consider the following elements:

- Plot
- Setting – what roles do atmosphere and mood play?
- Characterisation (Are the characters flat or round? What are their motivations, relationships? Who are the heroes/heroines?)

- Narrative (What type of narration, point of view, tone is used?)
- Significance of style, language – is the language formal or colloquial? What sort of devices does the text use: metaphor, symbolism, motifs, imagery or allusions?
- Structure (How many chapters are there? Is the story told chronologically?)
- Pace
- What is the book's climax?
- Consider the significance of the opening and ending – how effective are they?
- Was the book predictable?
- What are the themes, issues or concerns?
- Does the book have a message or a moral? (What is its contemporary or historical relevance?)
- Who is the intended readership?
- What is the significance of the book's title?
- What is the book's genre?
- The significance of the author (What have they previously written?)

You won't need to discuss all of these in writing your report; choose the ones you believe are most relevant.

Extension Activities

- 1) Using the Ishmael books as a model, imitate a short episode of 500 words dealing with one conversation or one event, or one school lesson on an ordinary day at school. The title should be taken from the text of the piece, and there should be a play on words or a resonating last sentence or punch line to summarise the episode.
- 2) List every poem mentioned in the text and find a copy of one that you would like to read the entire text of (the Internet is a good source if standard works are not available).
- 3) Write about a time when you were nervous and afraid, as Ishmael is when he is waiting to speak, or a time when something very embarrassing happened to you. Try to describe it so the reader can imagine what it felt like to be you at that time.
- 4) The author often uses exaggerated comparisons in the form of metaphors and similes to make the description more vivid and to add humour. Make a list of ten of your favourite metaphors or similes and explain why you think they are effective. Try creating some of your own to describe someone who is nervous, afraid or angry etc.
- 5) Design and create an anti-bullying poster.

- 6) Prepare a monologue as one of the characters from the novel. Try to reveal your chosen character's personality and thoughts and feelings about particular events and people in the story.
- 7) Select a scene or section from the novel and present it as a storyboard or as a graphic novel with words and pictures.
- 8) If you liked *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*, write and tell Michael Gerard Bauer why. Or if someone in your class comes up with a question about the book that no one can answer, write and ask him about it. Don't forget to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply. You can address your letter to the following address:

Michael Gerard Bauer c/- Omnibus Books, 335 Unley Rd, Malvern SA 5061