

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre and Dr Susan La Marca

***Falling from Grace* by Jane Godwin**

YEAR 7 - 8

Background

This is a skillfully crafted novel that precipitates its characters – and readers – into a tense and ambiguous series of events that we see from two perspectives. It demonstrates how extraordinary events can come out of the everyday, catching the young protagonists unaware and creating situations that test their relationships, sense of self and place in their families, just as the sea can change without warning from benign and calm to wild and dangerous. It unsettles the readers' reactions to characters. Kip and Ted initially appear to be innocent bystanders (though perhaps not quite so innocent in Ted's case) then possible perpetrators. The capriciousness of the weather acts as a strong metaphor for the unpredictability of events, especially for Kip.

Objectives

To employ the strategies and skills embodied in the following VELS statements:

Writing involves using appropriate language for particular purposes or occasions...to express and represent...events, experience, character, emotion...It involves the development of knowledge about strategies for writing...

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain – Writing Dimension* p6.

Focus: Creation of tension

Examine how skilfully the author builds tension.

- For instance even the choice of **season** is significant. It is winter when the sea is never as inviting as it is in summer, and appears wilder and greyer than the summer time of blue skies and aqua oceans.
- **Weather.** Consider the opening and the sense of foreboding it conjures from the contrasts of two extremes. Stormy weather is often used by novelists and film makers alike to induce a feeling of danger, threat and uncertainty. Kip describes the day as almost a summer day with the water sparkling (p4).

But only two pages later there is a *'long dark cloud'*, there is a *'cold wind'*, and on page 12 it builds to *'the bank of heavy grey cloud was moving'*. Following this the storm is always in the background, threatening and brewing – the dark backdrop to events.

'The cloud was charcoal grey and I could see more rain, far off, hanging like a flimsy curtain.' (p26)

'A heavy violet cloud had come down over us.' (p50)

The bleak weather dominates the period of the novel where Grace is first lost and the search occurs. The descriptions of the weather hang over the characters as does the similarly heavy and ominous descriptions of the ocean, the waves and water.

On page 38 Kip discovers Ted's fascination with storms when he sees the photographs of cyclones and tornadoes on the walls of Ted's home. Ted is inextricably linked to the bad weather that seems to surround the action. Later, when he could be helping, he is off chasing storms (p159)

- **The structure** of the novel also contributes to the tension. Consider:
 - Alternating, first person narrative
 - the short chapters
 - cliffhanger nature of many of the chapter ends (eg. pages 16, 30, 50, 52 and 57)
 - the short sentences in some sections (particularly Grace's chapters eg. pages 117 and 130).

How do each of these choices by the author affect the way we read the book? How do they contribute to the tension?

- **Strangeness of events**
 - Kip and the little boy running straight into him
 - Consider Jane Godwin's explanation for how the book came to be (preface).
 - Annie says on page 99 *'Things like this don't happen in normal families'*.
- **Language**
 - Consider the term 'innocent bystander' and what it means. Is there such a thing, or are we implicated by what we don't do as much as by what we do?
 - The definition of 'grace' – David Lodge tells us that names are never neutral. Why do you think the author chose this name for the character?
 - Ted's sayings reveal quite a bit about him don't they? For example, *'never trust a person with a tidy house'*; *'Never trust a*

doctor, man'; 'Never trust someone who can't enjoy music'; 'Never trust someone who doesn't like gardening'. Invite students to make up some that match their values.

Assessment

Examine the devices Godwin uses to create tension and have the students use them to write/storyboard/script their own scenarios.

Also, have them describe/evoke/act out an every day event into which they insert an unexpected happening and explore the effects on the characters involved.

Focus: Music

- On page 46, 94 and pages 102 to 103 Kip describes effect of playing the Les Paul, Fender and Gretsch guitars. Playing the guitar is described as like being in water – 'I was swimming in sound, drowning in it' (p103).
- Ted was a star in the early and mid 1990s. Write the rest of the song 'Still' from the lyrics given – 'Time held me green and dying/Though I sang in my chains like the sea' and compose or choose music to go with it.

Assessment

To link the themes of weather/seasons and music students could listen to *Four Seasons* by Vivaldi and respond to how Vivaldi creates a sense of the different seasons in a form of their choice. Does Vivaldi's interpretation of Winter fit the feeling in *Falling from Grace*? Perhaps students can suggest other works of art that evoke the feeling they get from their reading of *Falling from Grace*.

Related reading

The Song of an Innocent Bystander by Ian Bone.
What I Was by Meg Rosoff
Blue Fin by Colin Thiele
Kaitangata Twitch by Margaret Mahy
Of a Boy by Sonya Hartnett