

## Escaping Paradise

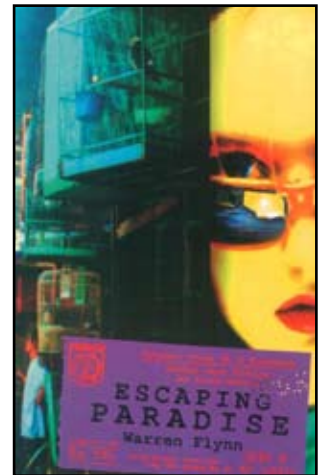
Warren Flynn

PUBLICATION DATE: 2001

ISBN: 9781863 682800

### The Story

A tropical holiday turns into a nightmare for Nicki when she is kidnapped by freedom fighters and held to ransom. But it's not her the kidnappers want. They think she's the daughter of an oil magnate, whose money can pay for the weapons they need. When they discover she isn't, things can only go from bad to worse.



### Author Background

When he's not writing, Warren Flynn enjoys mountain bike riding, sailing and splashing about in the ocean. Perhaps best known for his fun adventures of Gaz and the gripping suspense thriller, *Escaping Paradise*, each of Flynn's novels have been shortlisted in the West Australian Young Readers' Book Award. *Different Voices* was also shortlisted for the Western Australian Premier's Award. Flynn loves to travel and is fascinated by the many languages and cultures of Australia. He has provided professional development for educators in Vietnam, China and various parts of Australia. A former Asialink literature resident in Seoul, South Korea, he currently teaches at The University of Western Australia, Albany.



### Ideas for the Classroom

1. Explore either of the ideas below in an essay. Show how these ideas are demonstrated in *Escaping Paradise*. Also show that these themes are universal by referring to another text with a similar message.
  - One of the main themes is articulated when Empu gives Nicki the kris, and he says, 'The people ... the good people of the world must help each other.'
  - The phrase: 'Terima kasih', which means 'Thank you', can be literally translated as 'to give or receive love'.
2. Produce a masterpiece that represents your reaction to the ideas, themes, characters, places, conflicts or actions in *Escaping Paradise*.

Ideas for the masterpiece might include:

- painting

- sculpture
- dance
- figurine
- music
- drawing
- model
- construction
- mixed media

Once you have amazed your colleagues with your creativity, explain:

- Where did that idea come from?
- How did you do that?
- Why did you do it like that?
- What does it all mean?

(The following activities courtesy of David Marshall, Albany SHS.)

3. Warren Flynn has employed a wide range of techniques to tell the story in *Escaping Paradise*. He has chosen a complex structure shaped by the numerous points-of-view from which the story is told. These include the voices of
- a narrator
  - the main character Nicki
  - her mother, Elaine, and at other times her father Robert
  - Australian school friends, Holly and Josh
  - her kidnappers, Rama and Tono (separately)
  - Empu, an Indonesian spiritual leader
  - Lisi, an Indonesian woman

Even though changing viewpoints can so often be disorienting for readers, the author chose this technique, which lets us into the thoughts of characters at first hand, rather than through the narrator's eyes. At the same time, this also mimics Nicki's disorientation.

Discuss the inherent dangers, and also benefits, of employing this technique. Rewrite chapter 37 (pages 122–123) from Holly's viewpoint. How does your version compare with the one in the book?

4. Another, sometimes controversial, technique is the author's realistic portrayal of accents in *Escaping Paradise*. This contributes to the characterisation, plot, themes and setting of the novel. For example:
- Tono's English is 'hard to understand', but you will notice that it doesn't make him a less intelligent, or (eventually) a less compassionate person.
  - Although Nicki does not realise Tono is trilingual, she is able to interpret his non-verbal language (see chapter 28, page 93).
  - Tono regrets that Nicki is monolingual (chapter 40, page 130) — that they can't better comprehend each other's situation.

What are some other ways in which Nicki's lack of knowledge of Indonesian language and culture restrict her awareness of her circumstances?

5. Nicki's trauma is enhanced by culture shock. Her feeling of alienation is intensified when she hears her language spoken in an unfamiliar manner. This helps explain why Nicki so readily accepts when Karsana, who speaks with an Oxbridge accent, offers assistance.

Annika uses her knowledge of Indonesian as a weapon.

Discuss other characters, and how the author has portrayed their way of speaking, and knowledge of language(s). Read the dialogue aloud. How do the characters' ways of speaking contribute to our understanding of each?

6. The author uses dialogue to good effect. Choose an event, and rewrite it as a play script to act out with the class. Make masks for the characters to wear.

OR

Research the Wayang Kulit (shadow puppets) of Java. Adapt some aspects of Wayang Kulit to present a scene or two from the text, or to explore some of the major issues in *Escaping Paradise*.

7. Research the kind of boat which may have been used to transport Nicki to Java. Make a model of it, and any other forms of transport used in Indonesia which are not found in Australia.
8. If you were a musical director appointed to prepare a score for a screenplay for *Escaping Paradise*, what kinds of music would you include? Select two of the following chapters and suggest appropriate music for each. Explain why you've chosen it. Chapters: 7, 9, 10, 40, 41, 42, 58, 72.
9. Who is Empu and why does the author write from his point-of-view in some chapters?
10. Re-read chapter 56, then research the making of kris [keris] (refer to the website <http://joglosemar.co.id>) and design a kris using archetypes and symbols relating to your own family and/or culture.

For more detailed study

**Each of these activities might be presented as an essay, a talk, a seminar paper or a letter to the author.**

1. Explore the Australian media focus on United States news 'events', and examine why most Australian media largely ignores what is happening in neighbouring Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia.
2. Discuss how the author presents gender issues in this text. To what extent are gender roles culturally determined? Should one culture ever attempt to shift/change culturally imposed gender roles in another society? (e.g. Should Australian tourists cover-up more when swimming or touring in Bali?)

3. In chapter 39 (pages 127–128) Rama scoffs at the suggestions that Asians ‘intend to invade Australia’. Where do you think Nicki may have got this idea? Do you think either Rama or Nicki is correct? Why do you think the author raised this issue?
4. The author has said that he hopes older students will re-read the book, because ‘it’s a bit like a lotus pond — there’s heaps to discover beneath the reflection.’

Choose a passage or two to re-examine and comment on the extent to which multiple readings of texts reveal much more than your initial response evoked.

5. In visiting various private schools which purport to be founded on a religious base, author Warren Flynn has been surprised that so few students have commented on the theological aspects explored in the text through Empu and Nicki.

Explore the representations of Christian and other faiths through the text and suggest some reasons for the apparent lack of attention these issues receive.

6. Beginning with the title, irony is used throughout the novel to highlight the complexities within Indonesian society and the complexities of interpersonal relationships.

Comment on and illustrate several ways in which the author employs irony to illuminate various aspects of the social issues he raises.

## Further thoughts from the author

Since the Bali bombing in October 2002, some people are reading *Escaping Paradise* from a different perspective. When I was writing the book, I knew that the possibility of some kind of political fanaticism occurring there was quite possible. That’s one of the reasons I wrote the book. I wanted Australians to realise that what they saw as tourists in Bali was only the surface of one paradisiacal lagoon. There are so many cultural pools and rivers in Indonesia. And yes, amongst the myriad beauty, lurks some danger. But we need to understand what makes some people fall victim to using violence in an attempt to achieve their political or spiritual goals. Whether they’re impoverished amateurs or young soldiers in the world’s most powerful army, we need to understand why they are willing to kill people and risk death, doing what they believe is justified.

The only way to affect long-lasting change is to alter the conditions which create terrorists and criminals. Bombing people — whether from a FA18 or a suicide car bomb — only reinforces the old prejudices.

In Australia, people who work with young people (sociologists, teachers etc.) know that poor parenting, poverty, lack of employment opportunities and other similar issues are the things that breed drug dependency, criminal behaviour and the spiral of social dysfunction. It’s not so different in Indonesia. With extremes between the few wealthy and the many in poverty, and with limited employment opportunities, young people often turn to those who offer hope and purpose.

It's the same worldwide. The local priest, rabbi, or imam often provide guidance and purpose for these lost teenagers, but sometimes the peaceful message contained in the scriptures is corrupted and twisted into the horror of melting metal and burnt flesh.

## **Seoul mates**

Recently, I was given the privilege (through Asialink) of being resident writer and guest lecturer at Sogang University for one semester in Seoul, South Korea. What a blast!

If you ever want to experience one of the most vibrant and interesting cities around, check out Seoul. I was living in the Shinch'on area — four major universities within walking distance of restaurants, cafes, cinemas and night clubs. On Saturday nights it was a wild place to be! I've never been surrounded by so many people, so much noise, and so much good natured fun.

## **Students riot!**

One night I was out walking in Shinch'on and there was this huge crowd of thousands of young people protesting. Cops were out in force, directing the traffic. Roads were closed. It looked like serious stuff was about to happen.

I couldn't read the banners, so I carefully eased into the edge of the crowd and asked, 'What's happening? What are you protesting about?'

'Oh, it's not a protest,' the uni student explained. 'It's our annual sports day. Our team just won the football match!'

## **Dynamic**

Finding out about both the ancient Korean traditions and the modern changes which have made Korea so dynamic was a fantastic adventure. It was weird being 'the foreigner' — often I was the only Caucasian in trains, in shops, on mountain walks. A very different experience which helped me once again appreciate some of the problems which people from minority groups in our society face. A stranger's smile can change your life when you're feeling homesick.

I really miss my Korean friends — especially some of the Sogang students and other young people who taught me so much and made me feel so welcome. Annyong, Kim So-Youn! Kamsa hamnida, Kwon Hyon-Joo!

## **Tough times**

The last two years have been terrible for so many people. Afghani kids imprisoned like criminals in Australian detention camps. Refugees drowning because someone was out to make a buck from other people's misery. Iraqi babies born deformed because the US and British bombs which landed in their country in the first Gulf War contained radioactive materials in the warheads.

And then our Balinese friends and neighbours, together with eighty-eight Australians and other international tourists were murdered in Kuta.

How should we respond to these events?

One way is to attribute blame and try to punish those responsible. Anyone aware of what's happened in Belfast or Jerusalem in the last few decades knows how stupid that approach is.

Peace comes with education, understanding and discussion. It doesn't make 'good vision' for the TV news — people sitting down talking, arguing, talking some more — but it makes good sense. It doesn't make money for those who peddle newspapers, or give stock traders another percentage point profit, but for parents, kids and everyone who lives in the communities, it is a Godsend.

It's easy to point the finger at U.S. politicians for much of the idiocy that passes for world politics these days. But the same sorts of forces which (almost) elected him to power also seem to be running the show in Australia. Listen to talkback radio and you wonder: 'Who are these people? How can they be so misinformed?'

The voices of reason — those who believe in tackling poverty, injustice and ignorance, both here and elsewhere in the world — need to be heard. They need to be encouraged. Bad things happen when good people are silent.

### **Who's your favourite author?**

This is one of the most frequently asked questions I get when I visit schools.

It's a tricky one to answer, because it changes a bit, depending on who I'm reading that particular week. Some of the constants are: Tim Winton, Kazuo Ishiguro, Gail Jones, Cynthia Voigt and Garrison Keillor. I don't know that any of them have influenced my work much, that's probably easier for readers to judge. I also used to really enjoy some of the 'old' favourites — Steinbeck and Dickens, in particular. Heinrich Böll and Banana Yoshimoto are great too.

When I was a teenager I hated reading, except for poetry. It started with me listening to Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Paul Simon lyrics. There was so much brilliant rhymed verse on the radio. Then I got hooked on John Donne, Dylan Thomas and G.M. Hopkins. Afterwards, e.e.cummings and Miroslav Holub came along. I've written poetry since I was in high school. I never expected to be a novelist.

### **Good stories or great fiction?**

Great fiction challenges readers. Like Dickens' Pip, we're turned upsidedown, so that we see our own world, and the people in it, in a new way. It obliges us to ask the big questions. It makes us suspicious of the lies of commerce, the humbug of the powerful, and the ignorance of the ten-second video clip.

Fear, death, creation, pretence and passion, mystery and magic, lust and love — a person's connection to others in the world and to the cosmic powers of the universe. These are the

# TEACHING NOTES

stuff of all great fiction. Teenage fiction included.

Who cares if fiction reflects our lives or not? The important thing is whether it causes us to reflect upon our own lives.

As one teenager said: This book '...has not only touched my mind, but my heart as well ... this one book has changed my life in many ways.'