

TEACHING NOTES

90 Packets of Instant Noodles

Deb Fitzpatrick

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Synopsis

Joel is at a crossroads. His mates are pulling him in one direction, his dad and girlfriend in another. There's bad Joel and there's good Joel, but who is the real Joel?

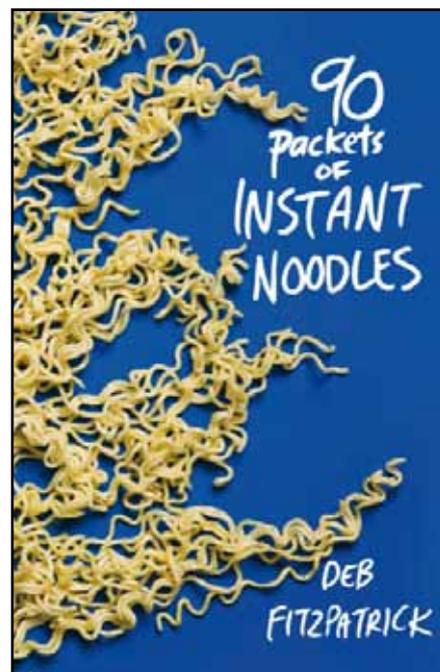
Bored and lonely, when Joel meets Craggs, life gets a whole lot more exciting. But what starts as a game becomes dangerously real. Flirting with petty theft (a couple of tools here, a bottle of booze there) is one thing. But as the boys get older, and the crime turns violent, Joel turns tail — but it's too late.

Joel's dad convinces the authorities to keep him out of juvenile detention, and incarcerate him instead in a lonely bush shack, far from the nearest city. Three months solitary confinement, without even a radio! Stuck in an unforgiving environment full of physical challenges, Joel has only his own resources to rely on. Doing battle with urban deprivation, dead possums in the water tank, feral foxes in the food cupboard, and a half-day trek to the nearest phone, Joel starts to discover a few things about himself. But the past has a way of coming back to bite you, and when Joel's old partner in crime tracks him down at the shack things quickly get out of control. Joel needs all his new-found inner-resources to survive unscathed.

A fascinating insight into the workings of an adolescent mind, exploring the complexities and contradictions, the competing influences, the desperate desire to fit in, and the drive to action without consideration for consequence. An exciting novel of personal growth and realisation from a talented new writer.

About the Author

"I was born in Melbourne, raised in the sand dunes of Perth, and, much later, spent four years living in a tiny rural village in the cloudforest of Costa Rica. It was there that I took my experiences of living in shacks and ploughed them back into a book about a teenager coming to terms with his identity and his future: *90 Packets of Instant Noodles*.



“At high school, I wrote a lot of bad poetry, and dreamed of becoming a writer. I also read prodigiously. English teachers took pity on me. When I studied writing and literature at university as an undergraduate, I became absorbed in Australian landscapes and the themes of identity, isolation and community. I love the works of Tim Winton, Robyn Davidson, Robert Drewe, Helen Garner, and American writers Frost and Thoreau. When, as a graduate, a local publishing house offered me an unpaid role reading its slush pile I accepted with glee. Far from putting me off, the experience confirmed my desire to be involved in the world of books and writing. After a very short stint as a reporter for a local newspaper, I took a job as an assistant editor of general publications at UWA. There, I did my apprenticeship in editing; I fell in love with it. But at nights, after work, I wrote. I left my editing job to do a master’s degree in creative writing at UWA, which launched my interest in writing for young adults. It also launched my freelance editing career.

“After finishing my postgrad work, my partner and I packed up our house and went to Costa Rica, where he would do his PhD research, and we would live in a series of mouldy shacks with resident armadillos, scorpions and monkeys swinging in the trees outside. I was unexpectedly, and wildly, homesick.

“I’m now a mother of two, and live in Fremantle, WA. Our house here has reliable running water, and the electricity rarely drops out. I no longer hear the sickening thock of a scorpion falling onto my bed in the middle of the night, but also, monkeys and squirrels no longer pass by my study window. Coyotes don’t come into the garden at night and howl, and it doesn’t rain—peltingly, for four or five hours—every day here. Army ants don’t come in and spring-clean our Fremantle house of insects — dead or alive — every few months. There are no puma pawprints on forest paths here, or sloths hanging in the trees above.

“But Costa Rica was by no means all Garden of Eden. I struggled with the intense isolation and the loss of my identity, as I knew it, that came with living there. I couldn’t speak Spanish; there was no telephone or internet connection in our shack; we were living on lean earnings indeed and I couldn’t place myself in the tropical landscape at all. When I came home one Christmas and heard myself telling people that I was living in Costa Rica, I felt as though the words were coming out of someone else’s mouth — my life seemed surreal; dislocated. Once, however, I began to master Spanish, and threw myself into a job, learned how to ride a motorbike and a horse, and came to terms with living with an enormous number of insects, I came to love it. One of the last things I did in Costa Rica was devote myself to writing a manuscript for young adults, in which the protagonist is forced to live in a shack a very long way from anywhere, with no mod-cons. *90 Packets of Instant Noodles* is the story of Joel’s journey as much as it is my own. Now, of course, I yearn for some of the things we left behind there — and I no longer take the comforts of an urban life in Australia for granted.”

STUDY NOTES

Comprehension questions

Answer this question before you start reading the novel:

1. Before you start reading the novel, have a look at the cover. What do you think the novel could be about? When you read the title, *90 Packets of Instant Noodles*, what ideas does it give you? Does it make you want to read the novel? Why or why not?

Answer these questions after you have read the first 17 chapters of the novel (page 7 to page 97):

2. What do you find out about the main character, Joel, in the first chapter? What information would you like to find out about him?
3. Describe in your own words the 'deal' Joel and his dad make with the Juvenile Justice Team.
4. Why do you think the author began the novel with the beginning of Joel's punishment, rather than with the crime he committed?
5. List the other characters that you meet in the first three chapters. What do you know about them? What is their relationship to Joel? What role do you think they will play in the story? (Hint: a table may help you organize this information.)
6. How would you describe Joel's relationship with his dad? Is it healthy or unhealthy? Why?
7. When you find out about the crime in chapters 12, 13 and 14, how does it change the way you read the story? Does it change your idea of Joel?
8. Why does the author choose to tell the story of the crime at this point in the novel?
9. What is Joel's attitude toward the punishment and the shack at the beginning of the novel? How does it change over the first 100 pages of the book? Why do you think it changes?
10. In the first part of the novel, the action takes place in a few different locations. Make a list of these locations. Do you recognize any of them? Which ones are real and which ones are made up?

Answer these questions after you have read chapter 18 to chapter 32 (page 97 to page 182):

11. What new information do we find out about Joel and his previous life in this part of the novel? How does this change the way you understand him?
12. In this section of the novel we get to read a lot of the letters Joel gets from his dad, Bella and Craggs. Read the letters from each of these characters and answer these questions:
 - a) What do you notice about the way each character writes?
 - b) What can you tell about each character from their letters?
 - c) How do each character's letters affect Joel?
 - d) Why do you think the author has included the letters for us to read?
13. What are Joel's main challenges when he is living in the shack? How does he confront

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each of them?

14. Based on what you can tell about the shack from the description in this section of the novel, draw a floor plan. You will need to think about where the door is, where the kitchen is, how many rooms it has, etc. (Note: You will need to use your imagination for some parts, because there is not enough information in the novel to draw the floor plan exactly.)
15. How does Joel change in this section of the novel? Provide evidence for your answer with quotes from the novel.
16. What can you tell about the old man that lives near Joel? Why do you think he lives out in the forest?
17. Joel thinks that Bella's letters change over time, and he gets worried. How does Joel think the letters change? What does Joel think this means? Is he correct, or does he worry for no reason? Use quotes from the novel to back up your answer.
18. In chapter 18 Joel has a dream about Sull. Write a short description of the dream. What do you think it means?
19. In chapter 27, Joel discovers a hemp plantation. How do you think the hemp got there?
20. Do you think Craggs is going to show up in the next section of the novel? Why or why not? Depending on your answer, what do you think will happen in this last section? Make a detailed prediction based on what you have already read.

Answer these questions after you have read chapter 33 to chapter 57 and the epilogue (page 183 to page 309):

21. From what perspective is the novel written? Why do you think the author has chosen to write the novel from this perspective?
22. Why does Craggs come down to Nallerup?
23. Has Craggs's experience in the detention centre changed him? Give evidence for your answer from the novel. How is this effect different/similar to the effect Joel's experience had on him?
24. How has Joel's attitude toward Craggs changed since their crime? What does Joel show this change in attitude? Why has his attitude changed?
25. Write a list of the slang words that Joel and Craggs use when they talk to each other (this does not include swear words). Write a definition for each one, and include at least one example of the word from the novel, with the number of the page it appears on.
26. When does Joel stutter during the novel? Why does he stutter at these times?
27. Some chapters in this section are in italics. Why has the author chosen to do this?
28. Why does Joel want to be at Craggs's trial? Do you think this was a good idea? Why?
29. After the trial, Joel decides to complete his time at the shack. What are his reasons?
30. In the [after] section, we find out about Craggs's sentencing and Joel's life after the shack. How do you think Joel will live his life after this? Will he live successfully? Why?

Writing activity

Write a review of this novel for the book section of *The West Australian*.

To do this you will need to:

1. Find the book section of *The West Australian* and collect a few reviews for other books to use as examples.
2. Read each review and answer the following questions:
 - a) What style of writing does the review use? Are the sentences short or long? Does she use formal or informal language? What kinds of words does she use? How long is it?
 - b) What are the written conventions of the review? Is there a title and a picture? What information about the book is included? What kinds of opinions does the writer include?
 - c) What does the writer of the review want the reader to understand? What is their main point? What kinds of questions is the reviews answering?
3. Work out what your opinion of the novel is.
 - a) Do you think it is a good novel? Why or why not?
 - b) Is the story gripping and/or enjoyable?
 - c) Do you think other people should read it? Why or why not?
 - d) What is Deb Fitzpatrick trying to communicate to the reader? Are her ideas useful?
4. Plan your review. Work out what you would like to say about the novel and write it out in point form. You will need to work out how to introduce your review, the points you would like to make, and how you will conclude.
5. Write the first draft of your review. Flesh out each of the points in your plan so that you have a fully written review. Repeat this process a couple of times, making changes to improve your review. Get a friend to proof-read through your draft to pick up mistakes and make helpful suggestions.
6. Write your final review. Once you are happy with your review, write out a final draft. Format your review so that it will look good in the newspaper. Make sure you don't forget to include pictures and a headline.

Reading activity

Create a timeline of the events in the novel.

The events in the novel are not revealed in chronological order; you find out about events from the past in certain chapters, and sometimes you even get hints of what may happen in the future.

In groups, create a timeline poster of the events in the novel by placing them in the order they happened.

To do this you will need to:

1. Get into groups of three or four.
2. Go through the novel chapter by chapter and decide when the events of each chapter take place. It may be helpful to make each chapter as 'present', 'past' or 'future'. If you

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mark a chapter 'past' or 'future', you will need to work out when the events actually happened in Joel's life.

3. Draw a draft timeline. You may need some large paper to draw on. Rule a long line to represent these years of Joel's life, and place the events of the novel on the timeline in the order they actually happened.
4. When you are happy that you have the order correct, create your timeline poster. Get a large piece of paper or card, and rule your line again. Write short descriptions of the events along the line in time order. You may like to decorate your poster, perhaps with drawings of the events.
5. Display your poster and compare your timeline with other group's timelines. You may find that your timelines differ slightly – that's ok, the information in the novel isn't exact.

Viewing activity

Draw a map of the area around Nallerup and Joel's shack.

To do this you will need to:

1. Scour the novel for information about the location of various places Joel goes around the shack and the town. Make notes of any useful information in the novel. You will need to think about the location of such places as:
 - a) the water hole
 - b) the old man's shack
 - c) the hemp plantation
 - d) the ridge
 - e) the Bibbulman track
 - f) the track into town
 - g) the short-cut track
 - h) any other places the novel mentions.

You will also need to think about the location of places in town, such as the store and the real estate agency.

2. Use the information you have gathered to make a rough draft a map of the area. Have a look at some other maps to get ideas for how maps are drawn. You may want to use certain map conventions like a legend, contours or grid coordinates.
3. Create the final draft of your map. You will need some large paper or card. Sketch out your map on the paper, then colour and decorate it.
4. Display your map for the class.

Creative writing activity

Write part of the story from the perspective of another character.

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As you have discovered, the novel is written in the first person, from Joel's perspective. What do you think the story would look like from Bella's perspective? Or from Joel's dad's perspective? How would the story be different? What new information might we discover? That's for you to decide.

Choose one of the three options below, and write part of the story from the perspective of that character.

Option 1: Write four diary entries from Bella's perspective. You could include entries from when she was with Joel, and entries from when Joel is at the shack. What is going on in her life? How does she feel at these times?

Option 2: Write a short story from Joel's dad's perspective about his experience of Joel's crime and punishment. What does Joel's dad think about the situation? What kinds of things would he want to say about it?

Option 3: Imagine you are Craggs near the end of the novel, after he has been arrested for the second time. Write Cragg's statement to police about what he did to the old man, and what he did in town. How does Craggs understand the events? What would he want to say about them? How is he feeling?

To do this you will need to:

1. Think about how that character writes and talks. What kinds of words would they use? How would they express their ideas? Collect evidence of this from the novel.
2. Plan your piece of writing. Brainstorm ideas for what your character is thinking and doing while Joel is at the shack. Write your ideas down in dot points, then order them into a dot-point plan for your piece of writing.
3. Write a first draft of your story. Write second and third drafts to improve your story.
4. Write your final draft of your story. Make sure it is nicely formatted and presented.

Speaking activity

Hold a debate on one of the issues that is raised in the novel.

90 Packets of Instant Noodles raises a number of important issues that are relevant to our lives. Was sending Joel to the shack a good idea or a bad idea? When Joel found the hemp plantation, should he have told the police, or just stayed quiet? Should Craggs have been expelled from his school? All these questions are raised by the story.

In groups, hold a debate on one of the following statements.

Statement 1: Young people who are convicted of crime should always be incarcerated.

Statement 2: Sending Joel to the shack was an appropriate punishment.

Statement 3: When Joel found the hemp plantation, he should have told authorities.

Statement 4: Young offenders like Craggs should not be expelled from their school.

Statement 5: Craggs was less responsible for his actions because his father abused him.

Statement 6: Bella's father was right to screen her calls and confiscate her mobile.

To do this you will need to:

1. Get into groups of three.
2. Choose a statement and whether you will be for (affirmative) or against (negative). Remember that another group will need to take the other side!
3. Read through the novel for examples and information that will be relevant to your debate. Make notes of the examples, and record the page number of each one.
4. Do research on your issue. Find as much information as you can about the issue you are debating.
5. Discuss your issue and use all the information you have gathered to form your arguments. Write out the arguments you will use in your debate. Try to predict what arguments your opposition will come up with, and find ways to rebut them.
6. Decide who will use each argument in their speech. You can't use the same argument twice in the debate.
7. Write each of the three speeches for your side of the debate. Each speech should be 2 minutes long. Make sure you include strong arguments in each one, and leave time for rebuttal in the second and third speech. Write the three speeches together — you need to know what each person will say.
8. Make palm cards that will remind you of what to say during your speech. You are not allowed to read your speech in a debate.
9. Hold the debate in front of the class. An adjudicator will time your speech, and decide the winner at the end. Good luck!
10. After the debate, you may like to ask the class to vote for the winning team.