



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary (ages 14+; years 9+)

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- This is a beautiful and ambitious story of memory, grief and identity. It combines popular themes of friendships and first romance with an evocative setting and complex, layered storytelling.
- Great intertextual layering – references many Classics and Modern Classics for potential crossover readings.

## THEMES

- Memory
- Family
- Identity and belonging
- Grief
- Stories/storytelling
- Mental illness

## PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

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9780143787853 (ebook)

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## Neverland

Margot McGovern

## BOOK BLURB

After doing herself near-fatal harm, Kit has returned to her island home. But it's a place she hardly recognises: the witch and the mermaids are hiding and the pirates have sailed to more bountiful shores. In their place is Neverland and its inhabitants – damaged teens too sick to be in regular school, watched over by her psychiatrist uncle. And now Kit is one of them.

Kit has a choice. She can use illicit night-time adventures with friends and mysterious new boy Rohan to avoid the truth. Or she can separate harsh reality from childhood fantasy and remember the night of her parents' deaths.

What really prompted her family's departure from the island? Did a monster drive them away? Is the monster still there?

**'Neverland is wild and tricky and tantalising – I fell in love with its pirate heart and gorgeous prose. For anyone who's ever wanted to stay within the pages of a book, or the mists of a dream.'** – Simone Howell, author of *Girl Defective*

## PLOT SYNOPSIS

Kit Learmonth has tried to end her story. After the deaths of her parents seven years earlier, she feels like her life can't move forward and that '*what sense of purpose and direction*' (p. 1) she'd had died with her father. Feeling ill and confused in the sickbay of her elite boarding school, she waits for her psychiatrist uncle, Doc, to come and take her back to her island home, Neverland. The island is her comfort. It's the place she can truly remember her parents and her seemingly idyllic childhood, where her father told stories about mermaids swimming in the shallows, pirates and buried treasure and the witch living in the forest. But when her parents died in front of her – a moment she has no memory of – her uncle turned the island into a safe haven for teens too ill for normal school but not sick enough to be hospitalised, and sent Kit away to various boarding schools.

Once back on the island, Kit thinks things will go back to normal and she is keen to reunite with her friends the Lost Ones, Alistair and Gypsy, long-term Neverland patients. But Doc realises that further steps must be taken and admits Kit as a patient. Unwilling to confront the truth about her illness, Kit continues to self-harm to relieve her distress, and distracts herself with sailing, drinking with her friends, and new boy Rohan.

Rohan is excited to meet Kit as he's read her father's famous book about the Learmonth family, *Kingdom by the Sea*. '*Until its release, we Learmonth's boasted only society-pages fame and the tarnished glamour of old money. Kingdom by the Sea, coupled with my parents' untimely deaths just before its publication, elevated us to the stuff of myth.*' (p. 46) Kit is wary of Rohan's interest, as the character based on her dies and she can't understand why her father wrote the story this way. She feels that she'll never live up to the fictional version of herself and worries that Rohan is seeing the fictional Kit and not the real one.

At her first Group session Kit learns that Rohan has lost someone close to him – Milly, his ex-girlfriend. Kit understands how Rohan is feeling and a connection between the two is formed. Kit doesn't want to talk about her family during Group and instead tells a story about a human who falls in love with a selkie – shielding herself emotionally by using the mythology of Neverland.

Kit soon realises that her demons have followed her home and she begins having panic attacks and hallucinations – selkies snap at her from the waves while she's out sailing, hands reach for her from the waves and she starts hearing an ominous *click, click, click* that she can't identify. Instead of opening up to Doc, who desperately wants to help her, she pushes

him away. She throws herself into her developing relationship with Rohan, removing herself from Gypsy and Alistair's company, and hopes that the support she and Rohan give each other will save them. But Doc warns her that '*It's a false light, kiddo.*' (p. 220).

Fragments of memories are returning to her and Kit realises that tensions were rising between Doc and her father before his death. Had Doc been trying to take her away from her parents? Why did Doc not return after that last trip away? Why were they talking about a monster in the house?

After a night-time adventure with Rohan goes wrong, Kit must decide if she wants to confront her past and remember what happened the night her mother and father died; or lose herself to her memories of a Neverland that may not have existed in the first place. Will Kit make the right choice in time?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margot McGovern is an Adelaide-based writer who holds a Ph.D. from Flinders University. She is a former associate editor of *Ride On* cycling magazine and has reviewed for several Australian literary journals, including *Australian Book Review*, *Kill Your Darlings* and *Viewpoint*. Margot blogs at <http://lectito.me> and you can find her on Twitter and Instagram at @project\_lectito.

## AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Margot says:

*Neverland* grew from a feeling of being stuck. Several years ago, far from home and feeling anxious and uncertain about the future, I sought comfort in the familiar by rereading *Peter Pan* – a childhood favourite. However, rather than being reassured, I was struck by how violent it was – how preoccupied with mortality and death – and how different from the innocent bedtime story I remembered. I became intrigued by this misremembering, by the way we, as both individuals and a society, romanticise and glorify the past in times of uncertainty and upheaval, and how this can prevent us from moving forwards.

I was also interested in the ancient Greek idea of *kleos*, which translates as 'glory' or 'what is heard' – that we achieve immortality through the stories we tell and are told about us. And I started to think about the narratives that endure and how, historically, these stories have disproportionately been authored by men.

So I decided to write a story about a young woman who is brought up on 'masculine' narratives and is assigned a minor role in her father's mythology, but who gradually learns to become both protagonist and narrator of her own story.



## TEXTUAL CONCEPTS

### Imagery and symbolism

Imagery and symbolism are important to the novel and add extra layers and depth to the narrative. Margot has used elements like the lighthouse, the island itself and the ocean to this effect.

- Look at the cover of the novel. There are many different images making up the cover design, including the mermaid, selkie, shipwreck, shells and crabs. How do these images connect to the narrative? Do you think some images have been given more weight than others? If so why? Do you think the cover adds to the atmosphere of the book?
- After reading the novel, do you think there are other images that could have been used in a symbolic way on the cover?
- What is the significance of the selkie? Using examples from the text, discuss who and/or what the selkie might represent.
- Why do you think Margot has set the story on an island? How different would it be if the story was set in a town on the mainland of Australia?

### Point of view

*Neverland* is told entirely from Kit Learmonth's point of view. But because of the gaps in her memory, she is a fairly unreliable narrator.

- Do you think having a sole point of view is an advantage for a narrative like this one?
- After reading the book, choose an important moment in the story. Re-write it from a different character's point of view. For example, what would the moment of Kit's panic attack (pp. 87–89) be like from Rohan's point of view? What would Kit and Doc's confrontation the morning after the bonfire (pp. 219–224) be like from Doc's viewpoint? What would an email from Cookie to a friend on the mainland say about the kids he sees on Neverland?
- Kit treats her friends pretty badly while she is dating Rohan. Write an email from Gypsy's or Alistair's point of view confronting Kit about her behaviour.
- Kit's mother doesn't get to share her version of the story. Imagine you discover a message in a bottle from Kit's mother. What might it say?

### Intertextuality

Kit is a character who has been greatly influenced by literature, storytelling and mythology while growing up. The author references many books – both classic

and modern – within the narrative, as well as poems and myths. The most prominent of these include:

*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

*Peter and Wendy* by J.M. Barrie

*The Odyssey* by Homer

*Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson

'Ulysses' by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

- How has the author used these references to show the reader what type of person Kit Learmonth is? What does her choice in literature tell us about Kit? Does it give an extra layer to her personality?
- Pick one of the texts above and see how it compares to *Neverland*. For example, are there similarities between Kit and Jay Gatsby? What connections can you find between the characters of Kit and Peter Pan?
- Kit draws on her favourite stories in order to tell her own, and to create her idealised version of Neverland. Make your own list of influential books and discuss the significance of each. Use your list to map your own fantasy island.
- Kit often connects her life to a myth or legend. If you had to pick a classical Greek myth to match your own life, which one would it be?

## KEY QUOTES

*'Doesn't it bother you that millions of people know your name, but everything they think they know about you comes from Kingdom by the Sea and gossip sites? Don't you want to take control of your story?'* (Rohan to Kit, p. 213)

- Do you think that social media stops people from fully living their lives? How would the way you interact with people be different if the internet didn't exist?
- How would Kit's life have been different if her father hadn't published *Kingdom by the Sea*?

*'Through the windows behind Doc's desk, I saw the Jolly Roger silhouetted in moonlight. I crossed the room and pressed my hand to the glass, my mission momentarily forgotten.'* (p. 109)

- There are several description of the *Jolly Roger* through the narrative. What do you think it represents for Doc? For Kit?

*'I am not afraid.'* (Kit pp. 21, 77, 79, 112, 144 & 264)

- Kit says this at different stages in her life. Take a look at each instance. Do you think she means it each time? Or is she just putting up a front?



## FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



*Fairytale for Wilde Girls*  
by Allyse Near

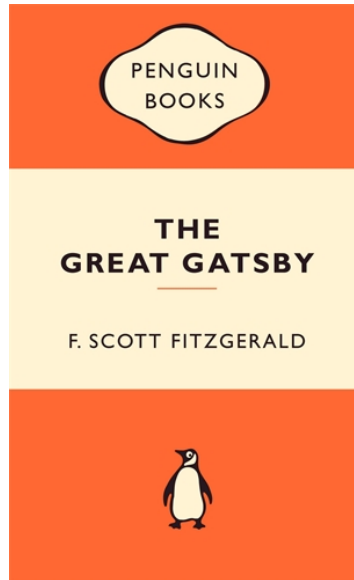
There's a dead girl in a birdcage in the woods. That's not unusual. Isola Wilde sees a lot of things other people don't. But when the girl appears at Isola's window, her every word a threat, Isola needs help.

Her real-life friends – Grape, James and new boy Edgar – make her forget for a while. And her brother-princes – magical creatures seemingly lifted from the pages of the French fairytales Isola idolises – will protect her with all the fierce love they possess.

It may not be enough.

Isola needs to uncover the truth behind the dead girl's demise . . . before the ghost steals Isola's last breath.

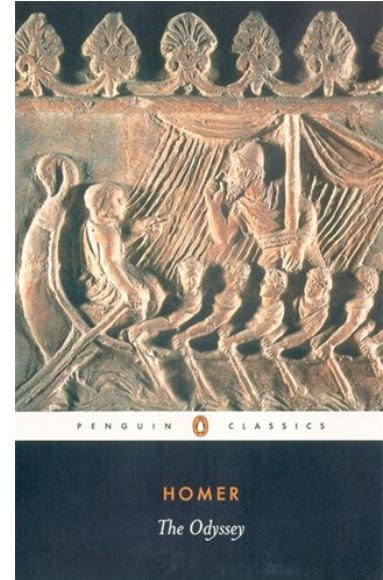
*Teachers' resources available.*



*The Great Gatsby*  
by F. Scott Fitzgerald

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* brilliantly captures the disillusion of a society obsessed with wealth and status. Young, handsome and fabulously rich, Jay Gatsby appears to have it all, yet he yearns for the one thing that will always be out of his reach, the absence of which renders his life of glittering parties and bright young things ultimately hollow.

Gatsby's tragic pursuit of his dream is often cited as the Great American Novel.



*The Odyssey*  
by Homer

The epic tale of Odysseus and his ten-year journey home after the Trojan War forms one of the earliest and greatest works of Western literature. Confronted by natural and supernatural threats – from the witch Circe who turns his men into pigs, to the twin terrors of Scylla and Charybdis; from the stupefied Lotus-Eaters to the implacable enmity of the sea-god Poseidon himself – Odysseus must test his bravery and native cunning to the full if he is to reach his homeland safely. But the danger is no less severe in his native Ithaca, as Odysseus finds himself contending with the suitors who, in his absence, have begun to surround his wife Penelope ...



## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
<i>Neverland</i>	Margot McGovern	9780143787846	9-12	\$19.99		
<i>Fairytales for Wilde Girls</i>	Allyse Near	9781742758510	9-12	\$19.99		
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	F. Scott Fitzgerald	9780141037639	9-12	\$12.99		
<i>The Odyssey</i>	Homer	9780140449112	9-12	\$14.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

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