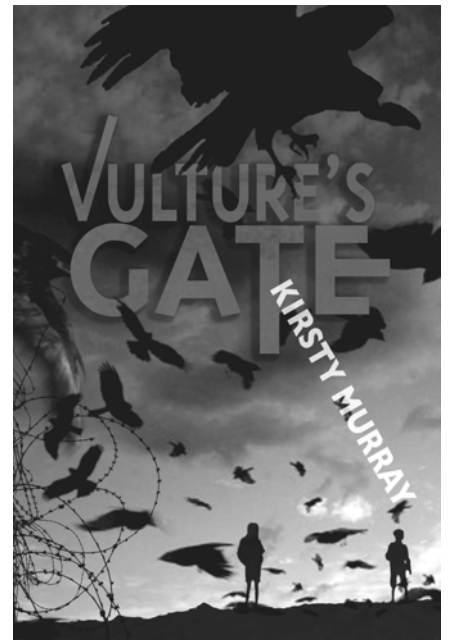


Vulture's Gate

By Kirsty Murray

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Vulture's Gate is a powerful and riveting novel set in a post-apocalyptic Australia. Disease and anarchy ensue in a place where women and girls are thought to be extinct.



- Suitable for students aged 12–16 years
- VELS level 6 (Victoria), Stage 5 (N.S.W.), Standard 5 - stages 14 and 15 (Tasmania), Years 9 or 10 (Queensland), Early adolescence (Western Australia), Middle Years (South Australia), Band 5 (Northern Territory) and Later adolescence (A.C.T.)

Vulture's Gate is a piece of speculative fiction, asking the question 'What if?' Callum is a Colony boy, stationed in the outback with his 'fathers'. Bo is a girl living in hiding from attacks by residents in an increasingly anarchic world. It is believed that women have become extinct and tribes throughout the land fight for survival and supremacy. Reproductive techniques mean that women are no longer necessary for the creation of men. Bo and Callum make an unlikely team, but they not only fight for their own survival, but that of a free, ordered and fair world where men and women work together.

Potential in the curriculum

Vulture's Gate can be read as an exciting adventure by students 12 years and older. However, using *Vulture's Gate* as a class text at Year 9 or 10 would lead to invaluable discussions regarding the environment, reproductive techniques and the role of law and order in society. It is suggested that *Vulture's Gate* be studied:

- As an **English** text:
 - ~ as an example of Australian speculative fiction;
 - ~ as a basis for a detailed piece of work on how the many and varied problems of the world could be overcome.
- In **Humanities/SOSE** classes as an adjunct to the study of environmental issues, alternative energy sources and crops.
- In **Health** classes to discuss the morality of introduced reproductive techniques and the role of women in an ordered society.
- In **Legal Studies/Civics and Citizenship** classes as a launching pad or extension work when studying the historical results of anarchy and the role of law and order
- In **Politics** classes to extend discussion of the role of government in society.

Teaching tools to support the study of *Vulture's Gate* could include Robert O'Brien's *Z for Zachariah*. Further reading could include Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

Author statement and sample discussion questions overleaf.

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In the classroom...

Vulture's Gate

by Kirsty Murray

From the author:

I wasn't actually in search of an idea when *Vulture's Gate* came to me. It's a story that ambushed me while I was busy writing a work of historical fiction.

It grew from disparate threads: a photo of a boy acrobat and an evening with my teenage goddaughter provided me with the inspiration for my two main characters.

The book deals with the potential consequences of developments in science and culture. I've had a long-standing interest in popular science and had followed the coverage of the avian flu virus and advances in reproductive technologies. I'd read theories about the future of gender relationships including what happens in societies with unusually high male populations.

Historically, the skewing of the gender balance has influenced the creation of armies of mercenary soldiers and orders of monks, such as the Shaolin monasteries of China. Without human intervention, nature ordains that there should be more women than men yet, because of female infanticide and a preference for sons, there are currently over 50 million more men in the world than women. These facts raise a lot of interesting questions about the future.

The ideas led me to explore the type of dystopia that results when the genders are completely out of balance. In *Vulture's Gate* I imagine a society where bird flu has damaged XX chromosomes so that the ability of humans to reproduce female children is compromised. It's a society of men and boys, where the few remaining women are prized captives. For the boy character, Callum, the existence of another gender is only a rumour – he's never met a girl or woman.

I've come across plenty of fiction that explores the notion of a world without men or where men are peripheral. Inverting that premise offered lots of potential for an action-packed story.

Contemporary teenagers have a vested interest in envisioning the world of tomorrow – one day they will be the people in charge. They will have to live with the consequences of older generations' decisions and actions.

One of the things I love most about writing for younger readers is that they are naturally philosophical and imaginative. In writing *Vulture's Gate* I wanted to encourage readers to think creatively about the future.

But while the book explores big issues, it's not didactic. I want it to create arguments and challenge readers rather than provide blanket statements. It's an adventure story and it's the action that draws the reader into the future world and keeps them turning the pages.

The book is also about the resilience of the young. In *Vulture's Gate*, it's the characters of Bo and Callum that give the story its heart. Despite the darkness that surrounds them, their youthful energy, optimism and strength keep them fighting for a brighter future.

In the classroom...

Vulture's Gate

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Discussion Questions:

1. How did the world get to be the way it is portrayed in *Vultures' Gate*? What events led to this?
2. Are you able to pinpoint when and where the book is set when you first meet Bo and Callum? What clues are you given about the era and setting?
3. Most of the names used in *Vulture's Gate* are symbolic to the story and characters. Can you explain the significance of at least five characters' names? What is the historical meaning of Bo's name? Can you discover the relevance of the names Bouboulina, Vulture's Gate and Mater Misericordiae?
4. Why are stories so important to Bo? Can you discover the significance of the robobraptors' names?
5. At present, we use in vitro fertilisation to help people who can't conceive naturally. How far away as a society are we from using the reproductive techniques described in *Vulture's Gate*? How did such techniques come to be vital to survival in Vulture's Gate? What are your thoughts on the morality of such reproductive techniques?
6. What messages does *Vulture's Gate* give the reader about the environment, the future and the role of women in an organised and peaceful society?
7. What are your thoughts about the motivations of the Sons of Gaia? Are they any better or any worse than Mollie Green, the Colony men or Roc? Explain your thoughts.
8. How do you think that such a fear of women came about? Do you think it will ever be overcome? Justify your reasoning.
9. What do you think the future holds for the crew of the *Bouboulina*? How will they survive?
10. What do you think will happen back in Vulture's Gate after the escape of Callum, Bo and the girls? Will law and order ever be restored? Explain what you think will become of the Colony and of Flakie, Mollie Green, the Outstationers, the Sons of Gaia and Mater Misericordiae.

Curriculum recommendation and discussion questions prepared by Judith Way. Judith Way is a teacher-librarian with a Graduate Diploma of Children's Literature and a Master of Arts. She was the recipient of the School Library Association of Victoria's John Ward Award for outstanding contribution to teacher librarianship in 2007 and was awarded the Children's Book Council of Australia Eleanor E. Robertson prize in 2003. Judith writes the Bright Ideas blog (<http://slav.globalteacher.org.au>) for the School Library Association of Victoria and has compiled the Readers Cup blog (<http://readerscup.globalteacher.org.au>) (<http://readerscup.globalteacher.org.au>).