

Teachers' Notes
by Lindsay Williams

YELLOWCAKE

by

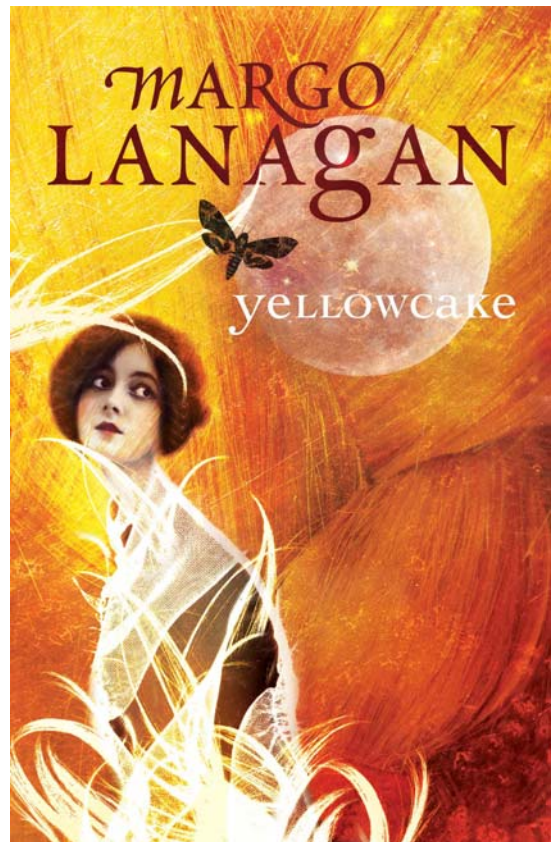
Margo Lanagan

ISBN 9781742374789

Recommended for ages 15–18 years

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INTRODUCTION

This is a collection of ten short stories. Recommended for ages 15+, the collection will particularly appeal to teachers who are looking for nuanced, literary stories to share with their students. Themes explored include humanity, human frailty, other-worldliness, tenderness, a sense of wonder in the world, family, gender relations and mortality. It would also be welcomed by those teachers wishing to explore the concept of intertextuality, with a number of the stories having strong links to traditional (including religious) stories.

A brief synopsis of each story appears in the main body of these Teacher Notes.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

These notes are aimed at middle to upper secondary classrooms. The activities are designed to be used mainly as part of an English program.

The English activities have been designed to take account of the three strands of the Australian English curriculum:

- Literature, e.g. the activities focus on developing appreciation of the short narrative form (short story) which has the potential for enriching students' lives and expanding the scope of their experience. In addition, students will appreciate the works of an award winning Australian writer.
- Language, e.g. many of the activities are designed to develop students' knowledge about how Lanagan uses language to create fictional worlds, encourage readers to suspend disbelief and align themselves with particular characters and values.
- Literacy, e.g. the Visual Analysis Guide and Questioning Hierarchy are designed to help students become more effective readers. There are also specific activities that assist students to think more like a writer (especially of short stories).

While some activities clearly belong mainly to one strand or another, many of the activities also draw upon these strands in an integrated manner.

EXPLORING THE STORIES

ACTIVITIES BEFORE STUDENTS BEGIN READING:

1. Before students begin reading, undertake a close study of the cover – a template for analyzing some basic visual design elements is included as Black Line Master 1 (BLM 1).
2. Drawing on their analyses and using concept mapping, students should brainstorm the associations that come to their mind when they read the title *Yellowcake*.
3. In groups, students discuss their expectations of the anthology – what predictions do they have about content, genre/s, readability, enjoyability etc.

CHAPTER 1: 'THE POINT OF ROSES'

Synopsis: A number of children participate in an experiment. A gypsy boy Jo has to make psychic contact with and guess the nature of three objects supplied by Billy: a rose, a stuffed dog and an ashtray. The experiment causes powerful waves of strange energy to ripple out across the landscape, affecting those living within range in unexpected and moving ways. Lanagan uses metaphor well here and there are themes of mortality, the strangeness/mystery of life.

Activities

1. After reading the story, students should make note of their immediate reactions, including:

- what they understood;
- what they found puzzling or confusing;
- what they were amazed by;
- what sense they make of the story.

Having done this individually, they can then discuss their reactions in small groups and work together to solve those aspects that were puzzling.

- Overall, Lanagan's stories can be quite strange and disorienting; there seems to be a deliberate desire to make the reader work a bit harder and encourage them to see the world from a different perspective. At this stage, it is worth spending time discussing some stylistic elements that will recur throughout the volume; an understanding of these features (and reading practices) is likely to increase students' appreciation and enjoyment of the stories. Discuss the following features (amongst others):
 - The stories generally start *in medias res* – a Latin phrase meaning 'in the middle of things'. The reader is thrown straight into the story with little (if anything) by way of orientating exposition. We are dropped into the world of the characters just before a crisis moment in their life.
 - The stories tend to be slice-of-life stories and, as such, often do not have clear cut, definitive resolutions. In fact, a number of story endings in this volume appear to be deliberately ambiguous.
 - As is common in much fantasy and science fiction writing, readers are thrown into a new world that is familiar, but at the same time strange. Readers must approach the story a bit like a jigsaw puzzle or a detective story where they are gradually uncovering clues. (It might be helpful to compare Lanagan's work with Shaun Tan's – the way that extraordinary things happen in a familiar yet unfamiliar world. Tan's work is very visual and students could look for clues that the worlds are familiar, but not our world. They could then try to identify linguistic clues in Lanagan's work.)
 - The naming of characters increases the disorientation effect. The names are often unusual and may even seem unnatural and odd.
 - Remember that Lanagan is widely regarded as a fantasy and speculative fiction writer. As such, her stories often have a fantasy/otherworldly element – for example, the 'wind' on page 11. At times, it is best to willingly suspend disbelief and let the story wash over the reader.
 - However, she also uses specific techniques that encourage you to accept the premise and 'world' of her stories, e.g. by not over-explaining, and treating what happens as matter of fact, just the way things are.
 - These stories are closer to what Roland Barthes called writerly texts (see, for example, http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~raha/700_701_web/BarthesLO/readerly.html). In this type of story, the reader has much more of a role in constructing the meaning of the text – not everything is laid out neatly or explained explicitly by the writer.

CHAPTER 2: 'THE GOLDEN SHROUD'

Synopsis: Told through the eyes of the Prince, this is a reimagining of the classic Western fairytale, 'Rapunzel'. The prince tries to save Rapunzel from her tower, but she has disappeared – nothing but her long, golden hair is left. While lying grief stricken, he is captured by the witch and locked in a prison cell. However, a strand of Rapunzel's hair that the prince has kept as a souvenir of his love comes alive mysteriously...

Activities

1. This story is clearly based on the well-known Western fairytale, Rapunzel, by the Grimm Brothers (see <http://www.familymanagement.com/literacy/grimms/grimms09.html> for

a version of this). Using a T-chart like the one below, compare a traditional version of the story with Lanagan's.

Aspects for comparison	Grimm Brothers' version of Rapunzel	Lanagan's version of Rapunzel
Title		'The Golden Shroud'
Characters		
Plot – including outcomes for characters		
Narrative point of view		
Language use		
Other differences		

In groups, students discuss the similarities and differences between the stories. How are readers invited to make different meanings in the two versions? How does Lanagan's version affect your reading of the traditional version?

2. These versions (and their various contexts, purposes and forms) can be compared to other, modern, incarnations of the story, including the:
 - animated Disney feature film version, 'Tangled'
 - graphic novel version, *Rapunzel's Revenge* by Shannon and Dean Hale, illustrated by Nathan Hale (Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-0-7475-8743-9) – this is set in the American Wild West.
 - song 'Rapunzel' by Australian rap singer Drapht.

CHAPTER 3: 'A FINE MAGIC'

Synopsis: Gallantine (a fascinators or magician) weaves all sorts of spells to woo the Leblanc sisters. However, they ultimately reject him and he takes cruel revenge on the sisters.

Activities

1. Using the Questioning Hierarchy in BLM 2, encourage students to read the story closely.
2. Using this Questioning Hierarchy as a model, develop further examples based on other stories in the volume. Although these could be written by the teacher, what better way for students to demonstrate their understanding of Lanagan's writing than to develop one themselves?

CHAPTER 4: 'AN HONEST DAY'S WORK'

Synopsis: The town is in desperate shape, with food stocks almost depleted and jobs lacking, when a beast from the ether is brought in to be cut up and processed. But the creature is still alive and makes a last bid for survival...And in the midst of this, the boy Amarlis finds himself wishing the whole town would be crushed.

Activities

1. In small groups and as a class, discuss why Amarlis wants the town crushed.
2. Using clues from the text and their imagination, students create a Wikipedia entry on the beast. Give it a biological classification and name, and include an annotated image (or drawing) of the beast. If you can get hold of it, Shaun Tan's ironically titled book *What Miscellaneous Abnormality is that? A Field Guide 257th Edition* published by Madman Entertainment Pty Ltd is worth a look as a part of this exercise.
3. On page 94, Mavourn asks 'How would it be to be a beast, to wake up and find yourself chopped half to pieces, and not in the ether any more, and with no fellow beasts to hear your cry?' Jupi replies, saying that 'No one can know how a beast thinks, what a beast feels.' Through role play, give the beast a voice – re-imagine the story and tell the 'beast's' version from just before its capture. Include what the beast is thinking and feeling.
4. Other storytellers have taken up similar themes. One recent version was the 'The Beast Below', the second episode of Series Five of *Dr Who* (see http://tardis.wikia.com/wiki/The_Beast_Below for more information). View this and compare the way Lanagan and the makers of *Dr Who* treat this topic – especially the moral complexity of both stories.

CHAPTER 5: 'INTO THE CLOUDS ON HIGH'

Synopsis: This is the night that Alice, mother and wife, is 'taken' into the clouds by a mysterious force. Through flashbacks we discover the night has been coming for some time and we learn of the husband's and son's attempts to understand and come to terms with it. The focus is on their reactions as they try to find her, realizing that the time has finally come for her to leave them forever. In one sense it's a story about letting go...

Activities

1. Students form small groups and choose one or more moments that represent a key moment for Mum, Dad and/or Marcus. One student from the group prepares a reading of the excerpt while another student 'sculpts' the character or characters into the scene; the 'blobs of clay' for sculpting are the remaining students in the group and, where appropriate, minimal props could be used (e.g. a flower stem). Once the sculpting is complete, students freeze while the text is read as voiceover narration. The idea is to try to bring out the 'heart' or emotion in the extract, rather than merely illustrate the action.
2. As a class, discuss how emotion is generated in the story – is it just there in the text? What does the reader need to bring to the text?

CHAPTER 6: 'NIGHT OF THE FIRSTLINGS'

Synopsis: A re-imagining of the story of Passover and Exodus as a group of people flees enslavement by the gypsies. It is a story about fear, God and faith – and the power of women.

Activities

1. Read traditional versions of the Passover story. Using a retrieval chart (such as the one suggested for 'The Golden Shroud'), compare Lanagan's story to the original and discuss the significance of changes to the way the story is read.
2. Ask students to locate another traditional story. Transform the story by changing the era in which it was set, the geographical location, the ethnicity or gender of characters. Then, have students re-write the story, being careful to ensure the re-writing is in keeping with the new context. Share these re-writings and discuss how readings of the original text are affected by the changes.

CHAPTER 7: 'FERRYMAN'

Synopsis: While working with his daughter ferrying the dead, Charence Armstrong falls into the River Acheron and dies. His daughter, Sharon, leads his shade to his home to say final goodbyes to his wife before he returns to the 'real' world for burial. This is based on the Ancient Greek stories of Charon ferrying the dead to the Underworld.

Activities

1. Students can research Charon and ancient beliefs about the Underworld – Wikipedia is an excellent starting point.
2. One of the changes in Lanagan's story is that Charon becomes Sharon, the Ferryman's daughter. Discuss the significance of this change and other changes to the classic version.
3. By now, some readers will have started to notice interesting gender issues in Lanagan's stories, for example many of the male characters are fearful, powerless, cruel or lost. The real power often lies with women. This could be seen as balancing the portrayals in many traditional stories. Encourage students to undertake their own study of the men and boys in this volume and compare them to the women and girls. Furthermore, examine the portrayal of males and females in more traditional tales, especially ones on which some of the stories in this volume are based.

CHAPTER 8: 'HEADS'

Synopsis: In a post-apocalyptic world, a small band of boys tries to survive, carrying on a guerrilla campaign against the 'enemy' (whoever or whatever they may be). The younger boy, Sheegeh, with his golden hair, becomes their good luck charm. He copes with the situation by measuring the heads of the dead and recording these measurements in a notebook. In a cruel, uncaring world, Sheegeh finds kindness in his relationship with Owen who teaches him some Maths...then tragedy strikes and decisions need to be made...

Activities:

1. One of the great strengths of stories is that they allow readers to walk around in worlds they might never visit, allow them to understand lives they may never live. In 'Heads', readers are given an insight to the children of war. Explore how sympathy is built for both Sheegeh and the Duwazza. For example:

Sheegeh

- reference to the parents whom he has lost (see pages 158, 164)
- making Sheegeh quite young and innocent so that he doesn't really understand what is happening
- his taking the head measurements of corpses and recording these in his notebook

- the use of emotive vocabulary, e.g. 'Sheegeh tied up the pack and shouldered it and shook Owen's hand. His face was **cold** and **tight** with the drying **tears**, his **eyelashes clumped with them.**' (p187)

The gang

- the use of euphemisms like 'warrumping' (p160) and lack of explicit description of what this means
- the superstitious nature of the boys in the gang which reveals an underlying fragility to their cockiness and bravado
- the almost tender way the gang treats Sheegeh
- the ultimate fate of the boys in the gang
- the use of emotive, evocative vocabulary, e.g. 'Brisk coughed up a **last gout of blood**. It **spread its red shine** down his chin and his **noisy breathing** stopped.'

Students can identify other examples from and features of the text which help build sympathy for the characters.

2. Encourage students to find out more about the effects of war on children by exploring the War Child International Network website: <http://www.warchild.org/> . Discuss the practical steps an Australian could take to help.

CHAPTER 9: 'LIVING CURIOSITIES'

Synopsis: What does it mean to be a circus 'freak'? The life of the carnie is explored in this story, centred on the dreams and frustrations of a dwarf woman, Nonny. But then, one 'strange young man', rich and with everything apparently worth living for, commits suicide in the sideshow's shooting gallery. The circus folk struggle to understand why he would have done such a thing. Despite people believing she is unusual, Nonny sees herself as ordinary – she wants people to see her as 'grand and tragic' like the dead punter.

Activities:

1. Focus students on the use of contrast in this story – the contrast between the lives and appearance of the circus people and the young man who commits suicide. Discuss the effect of telling the story from the point of view of people whom many would regard as living abnormal lives, as 'freaks'. Try re-writing the story from the young man's perspective and discuss what difference this makes.
2. On page 210, a merry-go-round (or carousel) features strongly in the story. Compare and discuss its use here and in 'A Fine Magic' (p53).

CHAPTER 10: 'EYELIDS OF THE DAWN'

Synopsis: The story opens with someone/thing complaining of an itch from lice. It lifts itself from the ground (on its walkers), starts to move and feel good. The story is told through the eyes of this strange 'beast', as well as two townsfolk, Sendra and Figuro. When the nature of the 'beast' is revealed, there is disbelief and shock as people try to put a rational explanation to a seemingly irrational event.

Activities:

1. This story has a premise that is difficult to execute effectively– a shopping centre (mall), picks itself up and walks away, escaping. Encourage students to talk about whether or not they were able to accept this premise and why.
2. Explore some of the techniques that Lanagan has used to invite readers to suspend their disbelief, e.g.

- Personifying the shopping centre, giving it a voice (in contrast to the beast in 'An Honest Day's Work') and human emotions (e.g. hope) – writing these sections in first person so too much explanation or description can be avoided
- Leaving the identity of the first person narrator ambiguous until the very end of the story
- Labelling the shoppers as lice and building sympathy for the 'creature' through the discomfort he feels as a result of their infestation
- the reality injected by the very down-to-earth, identifiable stories of Sendra and Figuro – and their awareness that something unusual is happening, but confusion about what that might be
- resisting the temptation to over-explain, even at the end.

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES (Whole Anthology)

1. Discuss and summarise some of the features that make these stories successful. In particular, focus on the elements that allow a writer to create 'compressed' narratives, e.g. the use of *in medias res*, compressed time frames and settings, the inclusion of absolutely essential information only, a limited range of characters, the development of characters through dialogue and action (as opposed to expository description).
2. In the 'Acknowledgements' section (p237 onwards), read 'Where the stories started'. Compare the original ideas with the eventual story. Where possible, locate some of the original sources. Then, encourage students to write their own compressed narrative based on a song, an image etc.
3. The back cover notes describe the stories in this volume as 'fiercely original and quietly heartbreaking'. Discuss whether students agree with this assessment and ask them to write an analytical exposition (perhaps in the form of a review) in response to this quotation.
4. Discuss the effectiveness of the cover – who is it likely to appeal to? How effectively would it attract teens – boys, girls, teens from diverse cultural backgrounds? Students can then create ways of marketing the book to different teen markets. Alternatively, create a new cover for the book.
5. Imagine the collection will be turned into a television series. In groups, students take a story each and propose how it could be transformed visually. The proposal could include: outline of a script indicating necessary changes to the written version (e.g. cuts, collapsing of scenes); storyboards; sketches of costumes, props and settings; suggestion for location shooting; and proposals for actors to play roles. Create a poster to sell the series (or one episode) to the public.
6. Listen to the audiobook version of Margo Lanagan's *Black Juice*. Discuss and evaluate the audio representations of the stories. Students could then prepare an audiobook version of a story from *Yellowcake*, including background music as appropriate, and explain the approach they've taken.

OTHER BOOKS BY MARGO LANAGAN

FOR TEENAGERS AND ADULTS

Short story collections

Red Spikes

Black Juice

White Time

Novels

Tender Morsels

Touching Earth Lightly

The Best Thing

FOR YOUNGER READERS

Walking Through Albert

The Tankerman

Wildgame

OTHER RESOURCES

<http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=312&author=99>

[This is Lanagan's official site at Allen and Unwin, her publishers. It includes a profile of the author and some of her thoughts on writing and the writing process. There's also a hyperlinked list of her previous books.]

<http://amongamidwhile.blogspot.com/>

[This is Margo Lanagan's blog. It includes a snippet about the editorial process involved in the production of *Yellowcake*.]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margo_Lanagan

[Contains some general information about the author and links to associated sites.]

<http://twitter.com/margolanagan>

[Want to do some social networking? Sign up for Margo Lanagan's Twitter feeds.]

...And for some (older, pre-*Yellowcake*) interviews with the author, visit the following sites:

http://www.insideadog.com.au/residence/interviews/margo_lanagan.html

<http://www.sfsite.com/09a/ml159.htm>

<http://meanjin.com.au/spike-the-meanjin-blog/post/six-questions-for-margo-lanagan/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/arts/articulate/200705/s1937470.htm>

FURTHER READING

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West by Gregory Maguire is a revisionist tale based on L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*. In this, the first book in a trilogy, the events leading up to Dorothy's visit are told from the point of view of two school friends, Glinda (who becomes the Good witch of the East) and Elphaba (who becomes the Wicked Witch of the West). There are two more books in the series - *Son of a Witch* and *A Lion Among Men* – and *Wicked* has also been transformed into a popular stage musical.

If students enjoy Lanagan's short stories, they would probably also enjoy Shaun Tan's work. Try this collection:

- Tan, S. (2008). *Tales of Outer Suburbia*. Allen and Unwin: Crows Nest, NSW. ISBN 978-1-74114-917-3.

And for strange but familiar worlds, see:

- Tan, S. (2006). *The Arrival*. Lothian: Sydney. ISBN 0-7344-0694-0.

- Tan, S. (2000). *The Lost Thing*. Melbourne: Lothian. ISBN 0-7344-0074-8. [Now also available as an animated film, for which Shaun Tan has been nominated for a 2011 Oscar.]

In a more conventional vein, the literary world is full of great short stories. Here are five very diverse ones that you could use as part of a short story unit.

1. *'The Nine Billion Names of God' by Arthur C. Clarke*

In Clarke, A. (2001). *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke*. Gollancz: United Kingdom.

This is a classic of science fiction published in 1953. Tibetan monks enlist the help of American computer programmers to find all the names of God. The tension is built beautifully to an understated but devastating conclusion.

2. *'The Destructors' by Graham Greene*

In Greene, G. (2001). *Twenty-One Stories*. Vintage: London.

Greene is widely regarded as one of the best writers of the twentieth century. This is the story of a gang of boys who wilfully destroy a house simply for the 'fun' of destruction. Some students will know the story through the pivotal role it plays in the cult film, *Donnie Darko*.

3. *'Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman' by Haruki Murakami*

In Murakami, H. (2006). *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. Harvill Secker (Random House): London.

Murakami, a renowned Japanese writer, tells the story of two cousins making a visit to a hospital for a specialist appointment. Although a translation, the writing is elegant, and there is a lot happening 'below the surface'.

4. *'The Witness for the Prosecution' by Agatha Christie*

In Christie, A. (1977). *The Hound of Death*. Williams Collins and Sons: Glasgow.

Published in 1933, this is the Queen of Crime at her very best. Leonard Vole enlists the help of the very practical and upright solicitor, Mr Mayherne, to clear him of a murder charge. As you would expect, the story contains a big twist in the tail. What makes this a great story for study is the work that Christie does in the orientation to convince readers of Vole's innocence – a point on which the success of the story depends.

5. *'Powder' by Tobias Wolff*

In Wolff, T. (1996). *The Night in Question*. Vintage: London.

A father takes his son skiing in the mountains, promising his ex-wife to have the boy home by Christmas Eve. After the roads are closed, the father - seemingly recklessly – goes around the blockades and teaches his son about letting go. Masterfully, but simply written, this story illustrates the popular advice about writing: Show, don't tell.

6. Finally, for a book sure to prompt lots of ideas for a story:

Van Allsburg, C. (1984). *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. Andersen Press: London.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

MARGO LANAGAN

Margo Lanagan is an internationally acclaimed writer of novels and short stories. Her books have garnered many awards, nominations and shortlistings. Her collection *Black Juice* was a Michael L. Printz Honor Book, and won two World Fantasy Awards and the Victorian Premier's Award for Young Adult Fiction. As individual short stories, 'Wooden Bride' was shortlisted for the James Tiptree Jr Award, and 'Singing My Sister Down' won and was nominated for many other awards, including a Nebula and a Hugo.

The collection *Red Spikes* was CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers, a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year, a *Horn Book* Fanfare title, and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writer's Prize and longlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award.

Margo's novel *Tender Morsels* won the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel and was a Michael L. Printz Honor Book for Excellence in Young Adult Literature.

Margo won a fourth World Fantasy Award for her novella 'Sea-Hearts', which she is now expanding into a novel.

Margo was born in 1960. She spent her childhood in a country town in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales, her teenage years in Melbourne, Victoria, then travelled about for a while. She has lived in Sydney since 1982.

Margo on writing

'I write because it's my way of making sense of the world. I've always loved reading, both to escape from real life and to make life more real, and I like doing both in my writing, too, writing straight realistic and fantasy stories.

'Inspiration is pretty much everywhere. I get it from reading both good and bad writing, from watching and listening to people, from landscapes and cityscapes, from wildlife documentaries and building sites and classrooms and music. My problem is not finding ideas but finding time to pin a few of them down to a page.

'I write a lot of stories with babies, children and young people in them, because I'm interested in the way people piece together their world for the first time. As we grow, we try to work out what's happening and why, to interpret other people's intentions. We also have fresher perceptions of atmospheres, weather, physical, social and interpersonal events, because quite often it's the first time we've encountered them

'*Yellowcake* is my fourth collection of short stories, following *White Time*, *Black Juice* and *Red Spikes*. I'd recommend that people take these collections one story at a time, maybe rationing them out one per day, or one per train trip to work. If you want strange dreams, read them just before you go to sleep at night!

'As for advice to new writers, I would say "Just do it, and keep doing it." The rewards come from sensing that you're getting better at this writing thing, that you can express more and more of your world in your own way, because your powers are always growing greater. Persistence is the main quality you need, to the point of pigheadedness and beyond.'

LINDSAY WILLIAMS

Lindsay Williams taught in state and private schools for 25 years, teaches pre-service English teachers at the University of Queensland, has an educational consultancy business and is in the early stages of a Ph.D. through the University of New England. He has written the two volume *English Teaching Survival Manual*, on-line resources for Screen Australia's digital learning site, the curriculum package for the ACTF's *Lockie Leonard* series, and teachers notes for other Allen & Unwin publications – Odo Hirsch's *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool*, *Worldshaker* by Richard Harland and *Jameela* by Rukhsana Khan. Lindsay has been a member of a number of committees advising on state and national curriculum and is the past-Vice President of the English Teachers Association of Queensland (ETAQ) which presented him with The Peter Botsman Memorial Award for contributions to quality English education in Queensland. His website is www.englishteacherguru.com.

GUIDE FOR ANALYSING VISUAL ELEMENTS OF THE COVER

Use the following table to help you analyse and discuss the visual elements on the cover on *Yellowcake*.

Visual elements	What can you see?
Objects What objects and people can you see?	
Size What size are the objects in relation to each other?	
Setting Is a setting obvious? If yes, what is it?	
Colours What are the predominant colours used?	
Position Where are objects in relation to each other? Are they in the fore, middle or back ground etc?	
'Camera' angle From what angle do the pictures appear to be drawn: high, eye level, low, bird's eye view?	
'Shot' type What type of 'shot' has been used: close up, medium, long, very long etc?	
Depth of field What is and isn't in focus?	
Light Is the picture bright or dark? Is it the same all over?	
Lines and vectors In what direction do lines in the picture lead the eye?	
Body language and clothing What facial expressions, gestures, use of space can you see? What is being worn?	

Comments/Interpretation:

QUESTIONING HIERARCHY: 'A FINE MAGIC'

Read the short story, 'A Fine Magic', on pages 51–64. Then, use the questions below to develop your understanding.

Level 1: Basic understanding

- Who are the three main characters in the story and where do they live?
- What is a fascinator?

Level 2: Key details

- What choice do the sisters make after Gallantine makes his feelings known to them? Why do they make this choice?

Level 3: Stated relationships

- What methods does Gallantine use to woo potential girlfriends?
- What is Gallantine's relationship to the 'young ladies' he meets at the ball (see pp53-55)?
- What is Gallantine's immediate reaction to the girls' choices (page 56)?

Level 4: Simple implied relationships

- Why do the sisters make the choice they do?
- Who places the white envelopes under the girls' doors? Why do both sisters receive the same message?
- How is it that the bedroom doors of the two sisters become 'brown smoke' (p57)?
- Why do the sisters just step through the doorways (p57) and accept the strange events that unfold without question?

Level 5: Complex implied relationships

- What is the relationship between the sisters' choice (see Level 2) and the forest and the carousel?
- Fill in the gaps: What is the back-story of the relationship between Gallantine and his 'new wife'? How did they get together? What is the nature and basis of their relationship – love or something else?
- What's the significance of the Leblanc sisters' name? Why is the 'new wife' unnamed?

Level 6: Authorial generalization

- What do you make of the way the story ends, given the fate of both the Leblanc sisters and Gallantine?
- What might be suggested here about the misuse of power in relationships?

Level 7: Structural generalization

- How does Lanagan's choice of narrator influence our understanding of the story?
- Why do you think Lanagan chose two sisters rather than an individual woman as central to the story?