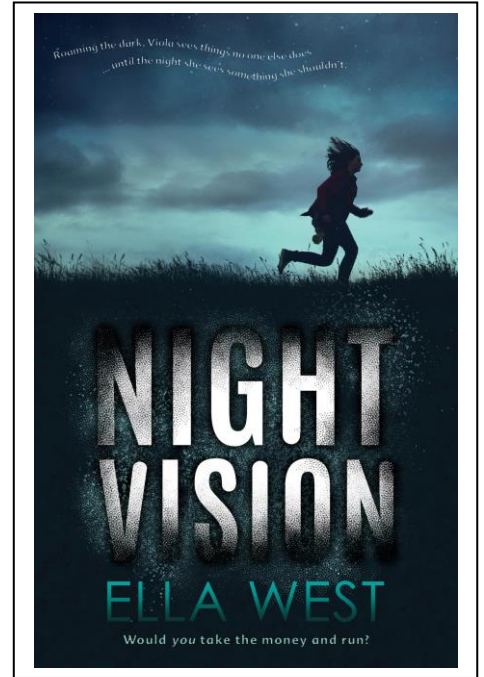


# Night Vision

By Ella West

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## Summary

*Viola was born with a genetic condition that makes sunlight deadly. In the dark of night, when most teenagers are tucked up in bed, Viola has the run of her parents' farm and the surrounding forest. She is used to seeing hidden things through her night-vision goggles, but one night she sees something that could get her into a whole lot of trouble...*

*Viola has always believed she would be dead before she was twenty, but now she must decide just how far she's willing to go to help her parents keep their beloved farm. Is it okay to steal from a thief? What if the thief might be a killer? And what if the killer threatens to come after her and her family?*

*A heart-thumping thriller that will leave you breathless.*

Viola has Xeroderma Pigmentosum (XP) which means she does not have the vital gene which protects her skin from UV rays. There are about a thousand children in the world with XP and few make it into adulthood. Most die from skin cancers before then. They can only go outside safely at night, like vampires and werewolves, and they are known as Children of the Moon.

Kids who go out after dark see things that no one else sees and Viola, wandering through the forest one night wearing her night vision goggles, witnesses a murder.

## Links to the Curriculum

This text would link well to any classroom pitched at Levels 4, 5, and lower 6 of the **New Zealand Curriculum**. Students would be able to "Make Meaning" from the novel and there is plenty of opportunity for students to then "Create Meaning" through teacher designed activities.

The text also supports the Key Competencies of Thinking, Relating to Others, and Understanding Language, Symbols, Text. The Key Competencies of Managing Self and Participating and Contributing would likely stem from normal teaching practice and classroom atmosphere. The themes present in the novel allow for classroom discussion around the Values highlighted in the curriculum document and support many components of Ka Hikatia.

This text links equally well to **Australian Stages 3 & 4** (Years 5-8) and fulfils the requirements of the Australian Curriculum's General Capability: Ethical Understanding. It provides a stimulating resource to base activities and in-depth discussions around Language, Literature and Literacy for each stage and year level.

This novel is well placed as a component of a theme or genre study.

See over for **About the Author** and suggested **questions, discussion points** and **activities**.

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Contact Carolyn Walsh, Education Marketing Coordinator  
Ph: +02 8425 0150 Fax: 02 9906 2218 Email: CarolynW@allenandunwin.com

In the classroom...

# Night Vision

by Ella West

## About the Author

Ella West lives on a small sheep farm in Otago, New Zealand with her husband and two teenage sons. She started writing plays for children for the New Zealand School Journal but soon crossed over to fiction and her first teen novel *Thieves* was published in 2006. Since then she has also written several adult plays including *The Middlemarch Singles Ball*. She enjoys writing for children and teenagers because anything can happen in a story for children. There's always magic. West was awarded the Louis Johnson New Writers' Bursary in 2006 and *Thieves* was a finalist in the 2007 New Zealand Post Book Awards for Children and Young Adults and was listed as a Storylines Notable Young Adult Fiction Book.

### **About *Night Vision*, Ella West says:**

*Night Vision* is about a teenager coming out of the darkness and into the light. If I hadn't been flicking through TV channels one night, this book would never have been written. By sheer chance I started watching '60 Minutes' which had on it a story called Children of the Night which was about kids with XP. I think you can still watch it on YouTube. It's an amazing doco. I've always remembered New Zealand children's writer Margaret Mahy saying that children see different things to adults and, if kids with XP can only go out at night, I thought they must see completely different things to adults and also other children. So what could Viola, my hero with XP, see that no one else sees?

I also wanted to write a book about music. When I get the chance, I go to a music concert at the university near where I live which is always at 1pm on Wednesdays. I know nothing about classical music, have never played a musical instrument, but I love listening to these concerts. It makes my brain work! It was in one of them that I thought up the opening lines of what is now Chapter Two. Writing about music also seems to make the sentences more lyrical. I love the sounds of words, how they work together, how the pauses change everything. It's great fun.

And of course there is all the sheep stuff. I grew up in a city and the novelty of living on a sheep farm still hasn't worn off. It's been fun to write about tailing and sheep dogs and possum shooting and what it's like working on a farm. I've also had some fun with the book's editor – she wanted to know what a lambing beat was!

## Comprehension and Discussion

### **Chapters One to Five**

#### **Comprehension**

1. How do you find out Viola can see in the dark using night vision goggles?
2. What does the man use to mark the hole he has dug?
3. What is Viola's "playground"?
4. What else has night vision?
5. What is the bank manager's title?

### **Discussion**

1. Why does Viola lie when her mother asks her if she saw the car fire? What would have happened if she had told the truth?
2. On page 34 the curtains "dance" to the music Viola is playing. What literary device is this and why has the author used it? Why are the curtains really dancing?
3. What is the "family joke"? Is it really a joke? Why do Viola's family use it?

### **Chapters Six to Ten**

#### **Comprehension**

1. Why is the word "nothing" written in capital letters on page 52?
2. What is playing in the trees as the man tries to find his money in the forest?
3. Why does Viola's mum have to go to Wellington?
4. What does Viola say is an *arpeggio*?
5. How did Viola's grandparents die?

#### **Discussion**

1. Explain what the saying "like a stuck record" means on page 56. Why is it an "old" saying?
2. Does Viola believe ghosts exist? What is her reason? Do you think it is a good one?
3. On page 67 Viola tells us her dad believes farming is the "only business that makes something out of nothing". What does he mean? Is he correct?

### **Chapters Eleven to Fifteen**

#### **Comprehension**

1. What happens when possums share sleeping nests?
2. Who or what does Viola pretend the woolshed brooms and bales of wool to be on page 96?
3. What literary device is used at the bottom of page 98?
4. Explain the difference between a huntaway and an eye dog.
5. What is a "terminal sire"?

#### **Discussion**

1. Viola believes farming is a man's job. Why? Is she right?
2. Does Viola think tailing lambs is cruel? What is her reasoning? Do you think she is right?
3. Is Viola upset when her dog Jim dies? How does the author show her feelings?

### **Chapters Sixteen to Twenty-Two**

#### **Comprehension**

1. How do the police identify themselves to Viola?
2. What does Viola order at McDonalds?
3. What does she find on the fridge door?

4. What is the name of her doctor?
5. How does Viola save herself when she is trapped in the forest during the day?

**Discussion**

1. Does Viola want to tell the police the truth? What stops her?
2. Why doesn't Viola want a puppy?
3. Why at the end of the novel does Viola tell her mother that she will stand in a spotlight on the stage? What does it show about how she's changed through the story?

**Further Discussion**

1. If you found a million dollars what would you do? Would it make a difference if you knew it belonged to a criminal as Viola does? What would be the right thing to do?
2. Imagine you are like Viola and can only go outside when it's dark. What would your life be like? How would it differ from now?

**Activities****Money**

What could you do with a million dollars?

- Write up a shopping/gifting list.
- How would it change your life, or someone else's?

**Music**

In *Night Vision* Viola plays:

- 'Meditation' by Jules Massenet
  - 'Hungarian Dance Number One' by Johannes Brahms
  - 'Concerto in C minor' by Johann Sebastian Bach
  - 'La Provençale' by Marin Marais
  - Prelude No. 1 from 'Suite for Viola and Orchestra' by Ralph Vaughan Williams
- Listen to each piece on YouTube and write a paragraph about it and its composer.
  - Do you think Viola's mum is right when she says on page 124: "Marais is a terrible composer, I mean, he was good in his day but what has come since him is so much better."?
  - Music, painting, literature, dance and other art forms have developed through the centuries but are modern pieces better than those from the past? Shakespearean plays (which are 400 years old) are still read and staged in theatres, Mozart and Brahms compositions are still played and listened to. Why? Should we keep creating new artworks when what has already been done is so good? What should today's artists aspire to?

**Genetics**

- Learn about Gregor Mendel and how he worked out the basic principles of genetics. Besides Xeroderma Pigmentosum, what other conditions are due to inherited recessive genes?

**Sheep**

- Viola lives on a Canterbury hill country sheep farm in New Zealand. Find out the yearly cycle of work on a sheep farm (lambing, tugging, tailing, weaning, drafting – can you add any more?). Why is each job done and why is it done when it is? For example why do sheep have lambs in the spring?
- Do a budget for a sheep farm – how much do farmers get for their wool and their lambs? What are their costs?

**Night Vision Goggles**

- Research how night vision was invented and its uses. See if you can find someone who has night vision goggles so you can have a look through them to see what it's like (a hunting shop may have them or try the Department of Conservation in New Zealand and the Department of the Environment in Australia).

## Language and Style

Examine the narrative of the book:

- What *person* is *Night Vision* written in and what *tense*?
- What effect does this have on the story? Can you find other novels that use this combination?

Examine the structure of the book:

- When the book was first written, Chapter Two was the first chapter and then there was what is now Chapter One. Why do you think the two chapters were swapped? What effect does it have on the story?
- How does the author build and then release tension? Consider how scenes from the past (flashbacks) are mixed with the book's present and the timeline of the book (from spring until summer) is used to do this.

Examine the cover of the book:

- How effective do you think the Australian/New Zealand cover is (look at colour, font, composition and framing)? Does it appeal to teenage readers? What message about the contents of the book does it send?
- Find a picture of the cover of the Italian version of *Night Vision* – *L'arte Ingannevole del Gufo* – on the internet. [The Italian title translates as *The Deceitful (or Misleading) Art of the Owl*.] How does the Italian cover differ from the Australian/New Zealand cover and what do you think of it?