



TEACHERS' NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower to upper secondary
(Ages 13+, years 7 to 10)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Ethical understanding, Personal and social capability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Great school mystery story from debut author Amy Doak.
- Fabulous example of a strong narrative voice.
- Features a wonderfully diverse group of characters who come together to solve the mystery . . . and become friends in the process.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Murder mysteries
- Moving to a new place
- Identity
- Challenging assumptions and biases

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

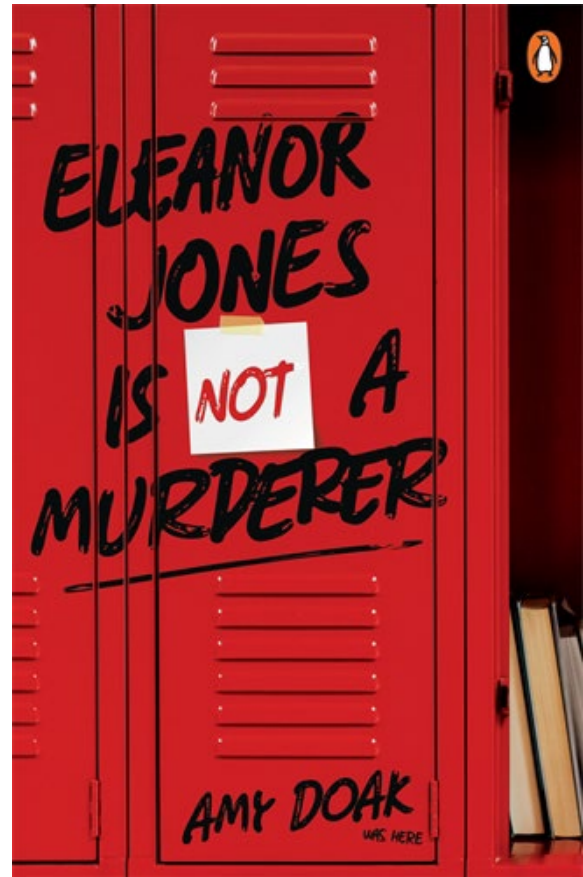
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Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer Amy Doak

PLOT SUMMARY

Eleanor Jones has just started at her ninth high school in less than five years. Since she and her mum are always moving on, Eleanor likes to stay on the outer, to stay invisible. So maybe it's just bad luck that the very first person she talks to at Cooina Secondary College, Angus Marshall, is stabbed and left for dead the same day. The last message on Angus's phone is from Eleanor Jones.

After being interviewed by the police, Eleanor realises they don't have all the facts and decides to investigate. In trying to understand what happened to Angus, Eleanor inadvertently becomes involved with an eclectic group of fellow students – all of whom have their own reasons to want to solve the mystery.

As they slowly unravel Angus's secrets, Eleanor discovers the true meaning of friendship – and uncovers a danger lurking at the heart of the town . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Doak is a lifelong lover of books, reading and writing. Following a career in media – advertising, radio, television and magazines – she continues to work as a freelance writer and is excited to see her non-fiction writing career evolve into a fiction one.

Amy lives in regional Victoria with her husband, teen, tween, dog and a very grumpy cat.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Amy says:

I have always loved a good puzzle. Raised in a household where crime shows and movies were considered quality family time (who could guess the culprit first!), my mother also introduced me to mystery novels at a young age. When I was little, *The Famous Five*, *The Secret Seven* and *Encyclopedia Brown* were the launchpad to *Trixie Belden*, *Nancy Drew* and *The Dana Sisters*. Then, as I got older, I found *Agatha Christie*, *Mary Higgins Clark* and *Sue Grafton*. Later, novelists such as *Karin Slaughter*, *Val McDermid*, *Elizabeth George*, *Minette Walters* and *Tess Gerritsen* all were firm favourites. These days, I love Aussie authors like *Michael Robotham*, *Candice Fox* and *Margaret Hickey*. Anything that inspires critical thinking, sets a cracking pace, keeps me on the edge of my seat and offers me the perfect escape are the books I look for. The idea of writing one someday has always been a dream.

I also love fabulous characters, a quality support cast and an element of humour. When I was growing up, shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (with an excellent group of friends) and cosy mysteries like *Death In Paradise* (fun side characters, a murder to solve) have always offered quality comfort viewing! I think my media consumption over the years has most definitely impacted my writing. *Eleanor*, as a voice, arrived fully formed in my head – almost like a real-life person – and *Min*, *Troy*, *Alfie* and *Namita* came soon after. When I was teen, I would have loved a book like *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*. Something fun and action-packed, with enough heart to make you want to be a part of this unique group. To me, books will always serve as a way to understand others and a place to escape into a world that makes you feel good. Perhaps that is the appeal of crime for me? The bad guy is always found, the mysteries are solved, the ending a happy one.

I've been writing since I was a child, but I always believed that writing novels – and being published – was something that happened to other people. Certainly not me! Over the years, I've become involved in my local writers' festival, and I've met some wonderful authors who have become mentors and

friends. One of them, *Katrina Nannestad* (who is an incredibly talented middle-grade fiction author) read the first few pages of *Eleanor Jones* as a rough draft and suggested I write it in present tense rather than past. With that feedback, and the positive nudge that this was a story worth writing, I was able to keep going – and I'm so glad I did!

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the cover. What can you tell about the book from the images used?
2. How has the designer used the typography, placement of illustrations and colours to communicate what the book is about and what genre or category it might fit into?
3. Do you think the cover would be as affective with a different font? Why or why not?
4. Look at the back cover of the book and read the quote from *Katrina Nannestad*. Based on her quote, what do you think the book will be like?

WRITING STYLE

Questions

1. The author has been inspired by a lot of the authors and stories she read growing up. Do you think you've been influenced by the books and stories you read as a child and as you grew older? Is there a particular author you've tried to learn from? What about that author's work attracted you?
2. Amy mentions that she originally wrote the story in past tense, then changed to present tense for the final version. What difference do you think being in past tense would have made? How would the readers' experience have been different? What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing in past tense and present tense?
3. How has Amy woven her own love of books into the character of *Eleanor Jones*? Find evidence of this in the story.

Activities

- The author originally wrote the story in past tense. Choose a section of the story to convert into past tense. Once you've done this, examine how this changes the extract for the reader. Which version do you find more compelling?
- Pick a character other than *Eleanor*. Now select one of your favourite scenes from the book and re-write it from your chosen character's point of view.



KEY STUDY TOPICS

Crime/mystery genre

The murder mystery genre became popular in the 1800s with the publication of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Allan Poe. Since then, the genre has grown in complexity and popularity. Favourites of the genre include: Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. And the genre has grown even more over the past thirty years.

Questions

1. What typical tropes has the author used to make *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer* fall into the murder mystery genre?
2. A key murder mystery trope is the red herring. There are many characters and situations in the story that aren't what they seem to be. For example, Ethan isn't the delinquent bad boy everyone thinks he is . . . What are some other red herrings in the story? How has the author used them to throw the reader off track?
3. Pick a character or moment in the story that is doing more than one thing. Discuss how the author has managed to lead the reader in the wrong direction or to 'trick' them.
4. Codes and patterns often play a big part in mystery novels. How has the author utilised this in *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*?
5. There are several examples of foreshadowing in the text – some more subtle than others. Can you find instances of foreshadowing in the story? For example: the colours of the folders; the mentions of tree houses.
6. Compare *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer* with another crime book you have read. What are the similar themes or tropes or examples of symbolism that you can find? Why do you think these are recurring elements?

Activities

- Mystery novels often keep the reader busy, engaging critical thinking in trying to work out the clues and sift the red herrings from the facts. In small groups, choose a pivotal moment from the story and discuss how you would have reacted in that situation. For example, would you have gone to The Sunny by yourself to see if Ethan and Bren meet? Would you have gone to Morgan's to track Ethan down? If not, what would you have done in these situations instead?

Friendship

Questions

1. Until the attempted murder of Angus, Eleanor keeps to herself a lot of the time. Why do you think she does this? What could have happened in the past to make her think being on her own is the best way to go?
2. Are there other examples you can think of – in novels, TV shows or films – where a person on the outer is drawn into a situation despite their desire to be alone? Why do you think this makes a great set-up for a narrative?
3. Troy feels guilty for what happened with his friendship with Angus. How responsible is he for what happened to their friendship when he was so young? (p. 112–114)
4. This story has a strong friendship group as its core. Can you think of other novels featuring a group like this? Why do you think so many novels, TV shows and movies feature a group of young people who bond together to combat a common problem or adversity?
5. Eleanor's relationship with her mother, Min, isn't typical. Why do you think the author has chosen this type of dynamic for the story? What does it allow her characters to do, compared to other mother/daughter relationships you see in novels?

Activities

- Each of the main characters at some point feels like the odd one out. Choose a character from the story and write a paragraph from their point of view exploring their fears and concerns about being left out of their peer group. How do they help (or hinder) Eleanor's pursuit of the truth about what happened to Angus.

Intertextuality and reading

Eleanor has a selection of classic novels that she reads and re-reads, but also uses to keep people from approaching her. She also judges people based on their response to the novel she is reading – for instance, at the start of the novel she is reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, but she hates the character of Holden Caulfield and thinks the book is overrated. She later forms an opinion of Namita based on Namita saying she likes the book. See **Worksheet 1: Reading the classics** for a list of the other books Eleanor reads or mentions.

Questions

1. Why do you think the author has chosen these particular novels to include? What common themes do they have with *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*?



2. Can you think of other novels that Amy Doak might have been able to include that would fit in with the mystery theme of the story? Don't just think classics – there might be more recent titles that could fit as well.
3. Why does re-reading the classics give Eleanor a sense of comfort and safety, when she moves house so often? Do you find comfort in re-reading books or re-watching favourite shows or films?
4. We know some of the books Eleanor likes to read, and we know that Troy has read the Harry Potter series because the books are in the tree house. From what you know of Namita, Alfie, Ethan, Min or Camille, what kind of books do you think they would like to read?

Activities

- Eleanor is an avid reader and a fan of the classics. Look at the list in **Worksheet 1** and write a brief synopsis for each novel. You might have to research the books you may not have heard of. Choose one of these books to read.
- The book Eleanor is reading when she meets Angus Marshall is *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Research this book and write a paragraph on how this could perhaps have foreshadowed the events in *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*. Are there other similarities or differences between the two novels?

Imagery

Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer is set in a smaller regional town in Australia, and follows a tradition of crime and mystery novels set in rural Australia, such as the novels of Jane Harper, Margaret Hickey and Chris Hammer, or Fleur Ferris's YA thrillers.

Questions

1. What features of rural Australian towns make them good settings for murder mystery stories?
2. What imagery does the author use to evoke a sense of the town's prosperity (or otherwise), and to evoke mood and atmosphere? For instance, abandoned factory 'The Sunny', the descriptions of where the hospital and school are, and Eleanor's description of the house where she and Min are living.
3. Does the story feel particularly Australian, or could it have been set anywhere? What makes it feel Australian?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would you call Eleanor Jones a reliable narrator? Why or why not?

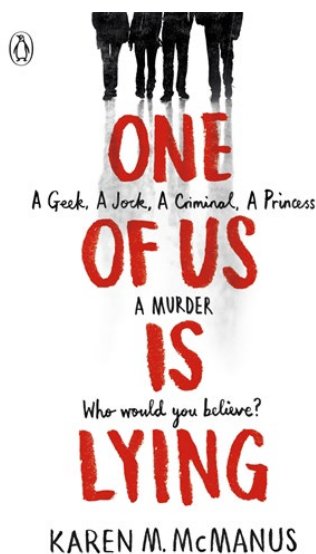
2. Many novels are mentioned in the story – see **Worksheet 1**. How do these three texts link to the novel *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*? Are they linked by themes? By the plot? Or by the characteristics of the main characters?

ACTIVITIES

- Write a chapter showing Eleanor meeting Angus on the bus. Make sure you stay in Eleanor's point of view and include first impressions, what else is going on around them on the bus and any other details you can imagine. (This could also include details that have been mentioned in the novel.)
- Once you've read the novel, go back and look at the cover elements – how has symbolism been used to plant seeds about the action within the narrative?



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



One Of Us Is Lying
by Karen M. McManus

Five students go to detention. Only four leave alive.

Yale hopeful Bronwyn has never publicly broken a rule.

Sports star Cooper only knows what he's doing in the baseball diamond.

Bad boy Nate is one misstep away from a life of crime.

Prom queen Addy is holding together the cracks in her perfect life.

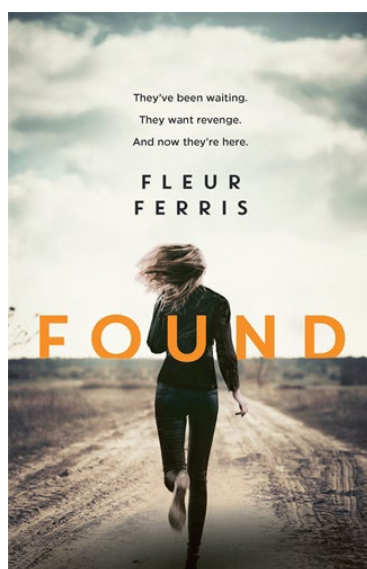
And outsider Simon, creator of the notorious gossip app at Bayview High, won't ever talk about any of them again.

He dies 24 hours before he could post their deepest secrets online. Investigators conclude it's no accident. All of them are suspects.

Everyone has secrets, right?

What really matters is how far you'll go to protect them.

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



Found
by Fleur Ferris

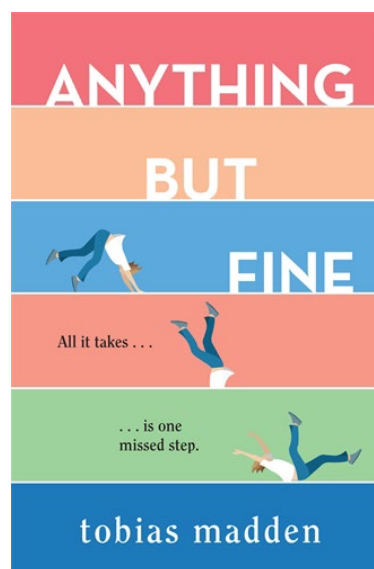
What happens when someone else's past catches up with you?

Elizabeth Miller has always lived in Deni. In a small rural town, Beth's biggest problem is telling her protective and fiercely private father that she has a boyfriend.

But when her dad disappears before her eyes, Beth discovers that he's not who she thought he was. Her family's secret past has caught up with them, and someone wants her dead.

Beth has been unwittingly prepared for this moment her whole life. Will it be enough to outrun – and outsmart – her hunters?

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



Anything But Fine
by Tobias Madden

Luca is ready to audition for the Australian Ballet School. All it takes to crush his dreams is one missed step . . . and a broken foot.

Jordan is the gorgeous rowing star and school captain of Luca's new school. Everyone says he's straight - but Luca's not so sure . . .

As their unlikely bond grows stronger, Luca starts to wonder: who is he without ballet? And is he setting himself up for another heartbreak?

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



WORKSHEET 1: Reading the classics

Write a brief synopsis for each of Eleanor's classics. Choose which of these you'd like to read . . . Feel free to add a couple of titles of your own to the end of the list.

Title of novel	Synopsis	Y/N
<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>		
<i>Franny and Zooey</i>		
<i>Jane Eyre</i>		
<i>The Murder of Roger Ackroyd</i>		
<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>		
<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>		
<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i>		



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer	Amy Doak	9781761342417	7-10	\$19.99		
One Of Us Is Lying	Karen M. McManus	9780141375632	7-12	\$19.99		
Found	Fleur Ferris	9780143784326	6-9	\$19.99		
Anything But Fine	Tobias Madden	9781761042027	9-12	\$19.99		
TOTAL						

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