

These notes are for:

- Secondary - years 11-12
- Upper secondary

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Verse novel

Style and Techniques:

- Multiple narrators
- Free verse
- Imagery

Themes:

- Belonging
- Friendship
- Identity
- Choices
- Adolescence
- Coming of age
- Homelessness
- Broken families
- Teen pregnancy
- Family
- Love
- Journeys
- Change
- Overcoming obstacles
- Drugs & addiction
- Domestic violence

Classroom Ideas may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

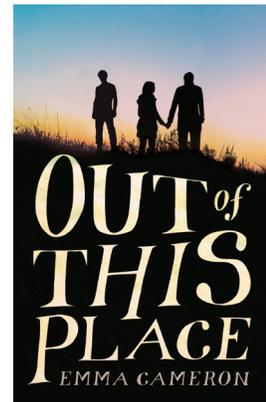
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Out of This Place

Out of This Place

Author: Emma Cameron
ISBN: 978-0-7636-6404-6
\$17.99 (\$20.00 CAN)



Synopsis

When everything changes, can friendship survive?

Luke spends his days hanging out at the beach, working shifts at the local supermarket and trying to stay out of trouble at school. His mate Bongo gets wasted, blocking out memories of the little brother social services took away and avoiding the stepdad who hits him. And Casey, the girl they both love, dreams of getting away and starting a new life in a place where she can be free.

This is a powerful and authentic look at teen life told entirely in verse. With its strong themes of growing up, friendship, choices and belonging, *Out of This Place* is an ideal text for upper secondary students.

Author Information

Emma Cameron lives on the South Coast of NSW. While raising two children, she worked in school libraries where she enjoyed being surrounded by books and young people. In 2005 she rekindled her interest with writing stories and has completed certificates in Creative Writing, Short Story Writing, Writing for Children and Editing. Her writing skills have been recognised in writing competitions for both short stories and novels, and her first publication was in anthologies, school resource kits and magazines.

Emma enjoys interacting with others who have stories to tell and enjoys the opportunity to help others explore ways to improve their own writing skills. *Out of This Place* is her first novel.

How To Use These Notes

These notes provide a variety of discussion questions and activities that can be used with *Out of This Place*. Please select according to the level, learning style and targeted outcomes of your students.

Emma Cameron on *Out of This Place*

“People finding their way in life fascinate me. At times, I delight in their resilience, resourcefulness and ability to continue seeking what is best for them. I am also amazed at how uncertainty has the power to prevent someone moving forward and how what is unspoken may sometimes have a greater influence on people than what is said. Still, I always hope that where someone ends up is not too distant from the space they aimed for. It is nice to think that picking uncertain paths may not necessarily always alter the destination too drastically, simply the journey undertaken to reach it.

“Initially the characters in *Out of This Place* came to me through Luke (who nagged me to write their story). Once I began, I explored how the things mentioned above related to my characters. I enjoyed watching them grow as they made choices and took the path they felt they needed to. I was rapt that the decisions they made helped them grow in a way that, while painful at times, honoured their needs. In addition, I was pleased to see their choices bringing them together again, as I felt they were destined to share more of their lives than only what we read in this story.”

About Verse Novels

Verse novels are a form of poetry in which an extended narrative is told through poetry rather than prose. While verse narratives date back to the epic of “Gilgamesh” and Homer, the verse novel is a distinctly modern form which has experienced a revival in Australia and NZ since the 1970s. In terms of style, verse novels may be written in traditional stanzaic forms incorporating a set metrical or rhyming scheme, but are most often in free verse. The genre draws upon narrative poetry such as ballads, but is also heavily influenced by lyric and dramatic poetry forms. The individual poems that make up a verse novel are often narrated in different voices and utilise soliloquies, dramatic monologues and interior monologues to allow the reader to experience a range of perspectives on events. Well-known Australian verse novelists include Dorothy Porter, Steven Herrick and Catherine Bateson.

The following articles provide more information about verse novels.

- Joy Alexander, “The Verse Novel: A New Genre” (*Children’s Literature in Education*, Vol. 36, No. 3, September 2005 www.longwood.edu/staff/miskecjm/381verse.pdf)
- Patty Campbell, “The Sand in the Oyster: Vetting the Verse Novel” (*Horn Book Magazine*; Sep/Oct 2004, Vol. 80 Issue 5, p611-616 www.valkyrie22.com/stuff/documents/Vetting%20the%20Verse%20Novel.pdf)
- Vikki Van Sickle, “Subcategories Within the Emerging Genre of the Verse Novel” (*The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children’s Literature*, Vol 10, No 3, 2006 <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/74/88>)

In the Classroom

Before Reading Out of This Place

- Have you read a verse novel before? What was your opinion of it? How is the experience of reading a verse novel both similar and different to reading a conventional novel? How is it different to reading an anthology of poems? Would you dip in and out of it as you might with an anthology, or do you need to read it in sequence?
- There are many ways in which stories can be told. For instance, play, film, graphic novel, documentary, short story, oral recount, etc. In your opinion, are some text types better suited for telling particular types of story than others? For example, an action story might be better suited to the medium of film rather than stage play. What sort of stories do you think would be best told as verse novels? What sorts of characters, events and settings might they feature? Imagine that you had been commissioned to write a blurb for such a story. Write two blurbs, one in prose and one in free verse, and share these with the class.
- Working in small groups, read a traditional narrative poem. (Some possibilities could be “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes, “The Man From Snowy River” by Banjo Paterson, “Venus and Adonis” by Shakespeare, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Coleridge, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” by Oscar Wilde, “The Charge of the Light Brigade” by Tennyson and “The Raven” by Edgar Allen Poe.) What is the narrative, or story, about? Does just one person tell the story, or a number of people? How would you describe the poetic voice? Does the poem have a particular metre or rhyming scheme? Do many people tell stories in this way today? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, where should verse novels be shelved in a library or bookshop: the poetry section or the fiction section? (You may like to review your response after you have finished studying the novel to see whether your ideas have changed.) Survey a number of bookstores or libraries about where they place verse novels and their reasons for doing so then present your findings as a bar graph.
- Research free verse on the internet. When did it develop? What are its characteristics? (Consider metre, rhyme, register and use of imagery.) Why might poets choose to write in this style? Find examples of famous poems in this style.
- Look at resource sheet 1, which shows a poem from the book printed without line breaks. Working individually or in pairs, break the poem up into lines as you feel is appropriate. Compare your work with another pair’s or classmember’s. Have they divided the poem in the same way as you? Discuss the reasons for your decisions. Find the original poem in the book and compare your version against it.
- From the title and cover of *Cinnamon Rain* only, what do you think the book will be about? Give reasons for your answer.

Analysing the Text

Characterisation

- Which character in the book do you identify with most? Least? Why is this? Write a journal entry reflecting on your response.
- The author uses very little physical description. Split into groups and, individually, list what you believe each of the three main characters looks like. Share your lists with the rest of the group, discussing any differences and similarities. Look at the front cover and see if the group agrees on who each character on it is and why they believe this to be so.
- What are your impressions of each character’s personality? Working in small groups, write a list of traits for each character and explain what it was in the narrative that made you identify this particular trait. What were the main ways you gained an impression of each character? Through their thoughts, or interior monologues? Through what other characters say about them? Through their actions? Through dialogue? Is this different for each character? Why is this the case? In a world where much emphasis is placed on appearance, does this exercise demonstrate why action and behaviour are far more effective tools for helping us connect with what lies inside another person’s heart, mind, soul and spirit?
- Give your impressions of the characters as you saw them in Luke’s story only. Now give your impressions of them as you saw them by the end of the novel. Do you think the characters grew by the end of the story? How? Could you see elements of their growth as the story unfolded? Identify three places where this is evident.

- Develop symbols to represent each of the main characters in the book. Present your symbols to the class, explaining why you feel they are appropriate.
- What differences do you notice in the narrative voices of the three main characters? Think about register, word choice, sentence length, humour and use of imagery. How would your experience of the book have been different if the author had chosen to use an omniscient or third-person narrator, rather than three individualised narrative voices?
- Examine the role of secondary characters: how they influence the main characters and how their action or inaction helps illustrate what is happening to the main characters.

- The use of the subjective, first-person perspective makes the reader inclined to empathise with the narrator and identify with their interpretation of characters and events. Choose one scene from the book and retell it from the perspective of another character that is present in the scene, but is not given a narrative voice. Some possibilities could include Bongo's mother, Casey's father, Jemma, Dylan, Lucius or Libby. Does this exercise make you view characters or events differently?

Structure & Style

- Look at the titles of the book's three sections: "Luke: Cinnamon Rain", "Casey: My Story" and "Bongo: Forever Forward". What does each title reveal about the respective narrator? Choose alternative titles for each section and explain why you feel they are appropriate.
- While many novels have one main protagonist, *Cinnamon Rain* has three. Examine the way each of the three main characters' viewpoints shows their individual story but also blends with those of the other characters to give a fuller picture of how these three lives are connected. Do you think that this applies to people's lives in general? In what way?
- The last line of each poem often provides a segue to the next poem. For instance, the poem "Soon" ends with the line "I'll walk", which anticipates the title of the next poem, "A Walk". Conversely, the poem on page 103 ends with the line, "I am lost", which connects to the title of the next poem, "Found". What other examples can you find of the final line of a poem offering a transition to the following one? How does this help create a sense of continuity in the book? Are there any other reasons Cameron may have used this device?
- In free verse, line breaks often serve to draw attention to particular words or ideas. Choose one poem from the book and examine the way lineation has been used to convey meaning.
- Some verse titles are used by more than one character. Find two poems with matching titles and, before rereading them, write a poem of your own with the same title. Now read all three poems and decide whether the title words represent similar or different ideas. Why is this?

Performance

- Choose one poem from the book and read it aloud. As a class, discuss the way that hearing a poem is different to reading it on the page.
- In pairs or small groups, select a poem which incorporates dialogue or multiple voices. Read the poem aloud, with different students taking on the different voices. How does this affect your experience of the poem?

Setting

- The novel opens at Pebble Beach, which operates as a place of security or escape for the characters in the novel. What words or phrases help present it this way? Could this setting be symbolic in any way, as well as a physical place? What might it represent?
- With regard to setting, there is little description provided by the text. Why do you think this is? What are your impressions of the places each character spends time in, particularly the places they come from and the ones they reconnect in? Where do these impressions originate? Discuss what role setting plays for each character and how it helps them move on or grow.
- In your opinion, is Cameron's depiction of the final years of high school realistic? What aspects can you relate to, or not relate to? Find quotes which relate to the depiction of school life. Some ideas to consider include relationships between teachers and students, class work, subject choices, friendships with other students, school holidays and formals.
- Compare Luke's, Casey's and David's worlds to yours and that of one other person you know. What is similar? What is different? Do you think, regardless of whose life or world you look at, every character or person will always have some things in common and some differences?

Language

- Do the characters in the book sound like real teenagers in your opinion? What language techniques does Cameron use to create an authentic teenage voice? Some ideas to consider could include the use of nicknames (Bongo, Duck), colloquial language (“there are days / when his world turns to crap.” (36)), sarcasm (“bright sparks” (72)) and humour.
 - Paradox, e.g. “A cocktail / of oppression and freedom.” (103). Conveys Luke’s fear and excitement as he embarks on his new career.
 - Repetition, e.g. “As much as I can. / As much as she lets me.” Emphasises Luke’s devotion to Casey.
 - Rhetorical questions, e.g. “Could I?” (98). Shows Casey’s feelings of conflict and confusion as she contemplates single parenthood.
 - Dialogue/direct speech, e.g. “Mr Tink, / aka Stink, / says we “...cannot be trusted / ... are all equally to blame / ... need to learn about consequences.” Creates a sense of immediacy and realism which brings the teacher’s voice to life.
 - Half rhyme, e.g. “its rhythm and pull / matching the thrill”. Mimics the movement of the train and Luke’s sense of mounting excitement as he embarks on a new life in the city.
 - Rhyme, e.g. “Green eyes stare / under tousled brown hair.” (228) Emphasises Casey’s attraction to Lucius.
 - Humour, e.g. “I thought / true wind was something / that came out your rear end” (336). Playfully highlights Bongo’s ignorance of sailing.
 - Symbolism, e.g. “her name, *Truth Seeker* / ... For now, / I’ll call her / *Destiny*.” (340-1). Alerts the reader to Bongo’s determination to forge a better life for himself.
- When Luke opens the story he says, “It’s like nothing will ever change.” In the verse titled, “Biding Time”, Bongo tells Casey to be careful because some things are “different for girls”. When he sees Libby’s boat, *Truth Seeker*, for the first time, he silently renames it *Destiny*. The author chose these phrases as predictions. Do the predictions pan out? In what way? Is it in the way you first thought?
 - Simile, e.g. “Bongo’s sobs are hurled out / like paintballs from a skirmish gun” (90). Highlights his sorrow and loss of control.
 - Metaphor, e.g. “One coloured thread / in our tapestry / is missing.” (195). Emphasises the close relationship between the three main characters and the sense of loss Casey feels as a result of Bongo’s absence.
 - Visual imagery, e.g. “It’s fully dark now, / not a silver of moon.” (64). Highlights Luke’s feelings of confusion and alienation.
 - Olfactory imagery (imagery relating to smell) e.g. “the smell of leaves / – like toasted fruit loaf” (112). Emphasises the sense of security and comfort Luke experiences at Pebble Beach.
 - Alliteration, e.g. “muddy mob members ... loping and laughing” (56-57). Draws attention to the feeling of mateship and connectedness the students experience as they gambol in the rain.
 - Juxtaposition, e.g. “if Casey lived/in another time or place/ she’d be like a fountain – / bubbles reaching everyone around her. / Instead, she’s as still / as a leaf-littered pond, / ... waiting desperately for rain.” (55). Illustrates Casey’s craving for a different life and her suppression by her father.
 - Play on words/pun, e.g. “Fully sick” (156). Literally refers to Casey’s pretence of being sick while also evoking her delight at her day of freedom through the slang meaning of the expression (i.e. something which is excellent).
- Emma Cameron uses a range of language techniques to bring her characters to life. Look for examples of each the following techniques, then for each example, explain the effect of the technique, or why it has been used. Present your work as a table. (You may like to complete this activity in small groups, with each group given one section of the book to analyse.)
 - Paradox, e.g. “A cocktail / of oppression and freedom.” (103). Conveys Luke’s fear and excitement as he embarks on his new career.
 - Repetition, e.g. “As much as I can. / As much as she lets me.” Emphasises Luke’s devotion to Casey.
 - Rhetorical questions, e.g. “Could I?” (98). Shows Casey’s feelings of conflict and confusion as she contemplates single parenthood.
 - Dialogue/direct speech, e.g. “Mr Tink, / aka Stink, / says we “...cannot be trusted / ... are all equally to blame / ... need to learn about consequences.” Creates a sense of immediacy and realism which brings the teacher’s voice to life.
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Themes

Family

- All of the families presented in the novel are to some degree presented as flawed or dysfunctional. Do you agree? Or are our judgements of these families unavoidably shaped by the perceptions of the narrators? Find quotes to illustrate the different family dynamics in the novel.
- Discuss the last scene of the novel. How does this help bring the motif of family full-circle, showing it is a universal or enduring theme?
- Casey says when contemplating her pregnancy: “I won’t raise a kid / and let it think / it isn’t wanted. / But could I / nurture and love a child / the way I deserved to be?” (249). Similarly, Bongo says of his drug-addicted mother, “I won’t wind up/ like my mother./ So, why am I still here?” (327). In what way are characters in the book shaped by their family backgrounds and upbringings? To what extent do they manage to break free of their backgrounds and forge new lives for themselves?
- Choose one type of relative and discuss the role that relative has in each of the protagonists’ life, e.g. all of the fathers, mothers or siblings.

Friendship

- Casey says of Luke, “While he does walk close, / his barest of touches, / unlike those of tag games, can’t set me free.” (137). Similarly, Luke admits to himself, “I’ve got Bongo out this time, but I can’t always save him” (47). While friends are an important source of comfort and support in the novel, ultimately they are unable to act as saviours, with each character needing to overcome their problems and change their lives for themselves. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- In *Out of This Place*, it is often the friends who fulfil the traditional role of family. Do you think this is often the case in our society? Discuss your responses in small groups.

Love

- “I shuffle aboard a train, / curl up at the end / of the last carriage, / thinking about / the different sorts of love.” (376). What different types of love are presented in *Out of This Place*? For instance, friendship, love between family members, romantic love, unrequited love. How do these relationships change from one section of the book to another?

Belonging

- Write an essay responding to the following question: “It’s not about blood”, / says Lucius. “It’s / about who you share / your life with. / Where you feel / you really belong.” (230). How is this comment borne out by the novel?

The Future/Life Choices

- In “My Favourite Place”, Luke says, “One more year / and I will be closer / to wherever I’m going.” Discuss the different paths the main characters in the novel take. What do you think motivates them to take these paths – or are these paths often thrust upon them?
- What ideas do you have about your life after school? Do you have any firm goals or ambitions? Create a list of ten things you would like to achieve before you are 30 and steps you might need to take to achieve these goals.

Homelessness

- What insights do you gain about homelessness through Bongo’s story? Some ideas to consider include the difficulty of finding work, life in refuges, drug use, physical safety and loneliness and alienation. In your opinion, does

Cameron depict homelessness in an empathetic and realistic way?

Are there other aspects of homelessness that she could have included, had she wanted to draw out this section of this novel?

- Research homelessness on the internet. Use this information to create a poster raising awareness of homelessness in your community.

After Reading: Bringing Your Ideas Together

- Imagine that *Out of This Place* had been criticised for presenting an overly negative portrayal of contemporary adolescence. Write a defence of the novel in the form of a letter to the editor for a daily newspaper.
- Choose one key theme from the book and write a sequence of poems exploring this theme. Emma Cameron provides the following tips on writing poetry: “Poetry gives story in fragments, similar to the way television and film does. Economy of words is essential in all writing, but particularly in verse. Create a verse of your own about anything you like. It is often helpful to begin without limiting the word count, then to go over the piece and cut what is not really needed to get across the message and those feelings you wish to conjure up in your reader. Next, examine word choices. Think about what words you choose, where you place them and why. Word choice and placement affects how something is read aloud and how readers absorb the message.”
- Imagine that the publishers of the novel were unhappy with the title and had commissioned you to come up with an alternative. Choose a new title for the book which demonstrates your understanding of its mood, style and key themes, then create an alternate cover featuring this title. Write a reflection statement explaining your choice of title and how you have used visual techniques such as font, colour, composition, framing, vectors and symbolism to convey your ideas.
- Compare an essay comparing and contrasting *Out of This Place* with another verse novel. (See the list of suggested titles on page 2 of these notes.)
- The book ends with the words: “So much / to look forward to.” Were you satisfied with the ending of the novel? Why or why not? If the story were to continue, what do you think would happen to the three protagonists? Where might they be a year after reuniting? Five years after? Write a series of poems that follow on from the end of the book.

Resource sheet 1: *Out of This Place* by Emma Cameron**Lineation Exercise**

The following poem from *Out of This Place* has been printed without line breaks. Read the poem through several times, both in your head and aloud. Once you have familiarised yourself with the rhythm and meaning of the poem, insert marks where you think the line breaks would be, (Hint: these are often used to emphasise key ideas.)

Living

Living Monday to Friday, ten till two, sandwich artist, industrial cafe. Friday to Sunday nights Italian trattoria, waiting tables, cleaning the kitchen. Crash in the van park.

Dingy and musty, the caravan cocoons endless hours of sleep; I'm still seeking escape even though I've left. Takes me a few weeks to notice my neighbours. Mostly builders.

Mornings they're gone before I appear. Friday and Saturday nights when I get home, they're out partying. Sundays, "a few quiet ones." Smile, nod, wink. I remember what

Bongo said, about it being different for girls.

Find the original poem in the novel then compare your work against it. Are there any differences? Do these differences change your understanding of the poem in any way? In pairs, discuss what this exercise has taught you about how the structure of a poem can help shape its meaning.