

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

## ***Broken Glass*** **by Adrian Stirling**

**Years 10 and 11**

### **Background**

This demanding book from a new author, written in a strong male voice, expresses a disaffected, small Australian country town view of the world. Danny is now twenty-one, but much of this story is told in flashbacks to the events that led up to the episode from which everything unravelled, when he was sixteen. Danny is disconnected and unsure about his place in the world, when Nile moves to Broken Glass. Nile pushes and challenges Danny to rebel, and they set themselves up as outsiders, deliberately rejecting being part of the town.

Violence is always bubbling. Things come to head when Nile rapes a young woman who then commits suicide. Danny is present when it happens. Perhaps he could have stopped it, but he was drunk and ineffectual, characteristic of most of his dealings with Nile. Danny testifies against Nile, destroying his own life in the process.

When the book opens it is five years later, and Nile is coming home. The story pivots around the unresolved tension between the two young men, and how Danny deals with Nile's return. The climax is confronting, violent and shocking, leaving the reader to ponder how Danny has been brought to this place.

### **Objectives**

*Literature, which is fundamental to the English curriculum, uses language to represent, re-create, shape and explore human experience.... Through reading, writing, listening to and talking about literature, students extend their understanding of the world and of themselves.*

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 6*, p. 26.

*[Students] write sustained and cohesive narratives that experiment with different techniques and show attention to chronology, characterisation, consistent point of view and development of a resolution...begin to use a range of language techniques to try to position the reader to accept particular view of people, characters, events, ideas and information.*

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2008) *VELS English Domain Level 6*, p. 43.

## Focus

### Country Town

*Stirling has a sharp eye and a talented turn of phrase. Describing the local farmers as men 'whose crops fail four years out of ten and (who) stay only to prove that they can' captures what is contained in volumes written about the difficulties of farming in the harsh and dry environment of rural Australia... The town of Broken Glass offers little hope for change. Employment options are narrow: local abattoir or the family owned businesses which struggle to survive small town economics.*

La Marca, Mario. *Viewpoint: on books for young adults*, 16 (3) 2008, p. 4.

- In the opening of *Broken Glass* (page 1 onwards) Stirling paints a vivid picture of the town, beginning with a panoramic view and then telescoping down to a focus on individual characters. It gives the reader a picture of the buildings, the surrounding countryside, and also the tone and mood of a struggling rural community focussed in on itself. This is rich, descriptive writing and excellent to use as a model for student writing.
- Students visualise their locale – it might be a street, a suburb, a town – and write a description of it beginning with a bird's eye view and then a focus on their house and family, including dialogue.
- Decide on the significant features that characterise the area as special and distinctive.
- These descriptions could then be translated into visual representations using a storyboard, drawing, painting, multimedia programs such as Photostory, Comic Life.

### Title

- *Broken Glass* is both the title of the book and the name of the town. It works in a number of ways to support and extend Stirling's exploration of a town that is outwardly strong and resilient, like glass, yet easily shattered and fragile.
- Discuss the images the title evokes; explore how the words 'broken' and 'glass' work separately, and the images they create together.
- Students could develop other names for the town of *Broken Glass*, a similarly descriptive and evocative two-word name. This activity could be extended to encompass renaming their descriptions of their local area.
- Discussion should centre on the power of words to evoke a feeling and convey emotional responses.

### Assessment

- Take the initial description of the area that students have chosen to write about, and then have them add the layers of tension and undercurrents below the surface as does Stirling. For example, *Broken Glass* is geographically isolated and economically disadvantaged. What are the constraints in the students' particular areas? Have them create imaginary characters that expose the underbelly that might exist behind the facades.
- Before writing, discuss how Stirling develops the sense of the town's insular nature and its townspeople through such descriptions as '*...country men are only meant to*

have three emotions – happy, sad or angry. Any more than that and they become strange’ (p. 5). ‘I would never have guessed that Ray killed things for a living. I had seen him kiss his wife. I had seen him picking his kids up after football. I wondered if they knew that all he did at work was stand with a bolt gun, stripping animals of their lives’ (p. 116).

## Related Reading

### Country Towns

- Bateson, Catherine *His Name in Fire*
- Bowles, Colin *Nights in the Sun*
- Burke, J. C. *The Story of Tom Brennan*
- Crowley, Cath *Chasing Charlie Duskin*
- Gardner, Scot *Gravity*
- Gwynne, Phillip *Jetty Rats*
- Hartnett, Sonya *Surrender*
- Lawrinson, Julia *Bye, Beautiful*
- Metzenthien, David *Stony Heart Country*  
*Black Water*
- Moloney, James A *Bridge to Wiseman’s Cove*
- Pegler, Tim *Game as Ned*
- Roy, James *Town*

### Moral Issues

- Barnes, Helen *Killing Aurora*
- Block, Francesca Lia *The Hanged Man*  
*I was a Teenage Fairy*
- Bone, Ian *Song of an Innocent Bystander*
- Hartnett, Sonya *All my Dangerous Friends*
- Kuijer, Guus *The Book of Everything*
- Lanagan, Margo *Touching Earth Lightly*
- McFarlane, Peter *The Enemy you Killed*
- Moloney, James *Kill the Possum*
- Monk, Scott *Raw*
- Nunn, Cameron *Shadows in the Mirror*
- Parker, Michael *Doppelganger*
- Parry, Glyn *Monster Man*
- Voigt, Cynthia *When She Hollers*
- Walters, Celeste *The Killing of Mudeye*
- Wild, Margaret & Anne Spudvilas *Woolvs in the Sitee*

BROKEN FRIENDSHIPS, SHATTERED LIVES.  
**ADRIAN STIRLING**