



**TURTLES ALL
THE WAY DOWN
TEACHING RESOURCE**



Penguin
Random House
Australia

The question of how much we control our own lives and how much is predetermined is a common subject in literature.

Consider the following quotations:

- ...your life is a story told about you, not one you tell (p1).
- You think you're the painter, but you're the canvas (p2).
- The way he talked about thoughts was the way I experienced them – not as a choice but as a destiny. Not a catalog of my consciousness, but a refutation of it (p59).
- Life is not something you wield (p66).
- Adults think they're wielding power, but really power is wielding them (p145).
- '...is there a you independent of circumstances?'(p165)

Do you agree with Aza that we are not in control of our own life stories? In what ways are we all 'fictional characters'?

Anybody can look at you. It's quite rare to find someone who sees the same world you see (p9).

Do you agree that people all see the world differently? What causes these different interpretations?

True terror isn't being scared; it's not having a choice in the matter (p22). Do you agree with this statement? Why is Aza not afraid when she is in the sewer?

Aza says that there are no words to describe fear other than through metaphors. What does she mean by this? Do you agree? How could you describe your personal fears?



The transition from childhood to adulthood, or rites of passage, is a common theme in writing. I was so good at being a kid and so terrible at being whatever I was now (p25). Why is it so unsettling for many people? What circumstances may have made the transition harder for Aza, Daisy and Davis?

Aza calls her thoughts 'invaders' as they constantly invade her mind and distract her from 'rational' thought. Is she as alone as she believes in experiencing invaders?

Why does Davis doubt Aza's sincerity in wanting to renew their friendship? How does he solve this problem by giving her \$100,000? What does this suggest about his experiences in life and his understanding of relationships? Why does Aza accept the money?



Edgar Allan Poe says 'the question is not yet settled whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence' (p132). Who determines what is sanity and insanity? Make a list of talented people in history who were regarded as being mad. In what way can it be seen to be this insanity that makes them particularly gifted?

Aza hates taking her medication: It was weird and upsetting about the notion that you only became yourself by ingesting a medication that changes yourself (p165). Is it right to medicate people with anxiety, or those who think differently? How might it change them?

What challenges do Aza, Davis and Daisy face in their lives? What does this suggest about the notion of normality? What is the irony of making Mychal the least complicated character?

Davis writes poetry that doesn't quite rhyme: 'Life rhymes, but not in the way you'd expect' (p151). What does he mean by this?



MOTIFS:

The past: The stars, the tuatara and the 'turtles all the way down' are links to the past. What is their impact?

What is the significance of the title?

The present (technology): How does technology help Aza's relationships?

What is the impact of inter-weaving traditional literature and modern communication?

Comforts: How are Aza's callused finger and Davis' Iron Man figurine similar?

Spirals: What examples of spirals (both literal and metaphoric) can you find and what impact do they have?

Disease: Why does Aza worry about bacteria? In what way are 'thoughts...just a different kind of bacteria,



colonizing you' (p227). What 'diseases' does modern society suffer?

Control: Consider the notions of threats and control. In what ways do 'You serve whatever you worship' (p269). How does Aza's cutting of her finger give her control?

Daisy says, 'Maybe you don't choose what's in the picture, but you decide on the frame' (p277). What does she mean by this and how does it help people to deal with the notion of predestination?

Why does the novel not have a happy-ever-after ending? Could it have ended any differently or been 'placed in a different frame'?