



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper secondary  
Ages 16+

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Modern History
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A true story that gently introduces students to the realities of returned soldiers, PTSD, and domestic violence

## THEMES

- Vietnam War and PTSD
- Domestic Violence
- Alcoholism
- Survival (Resilience)

## PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Laura Gordon

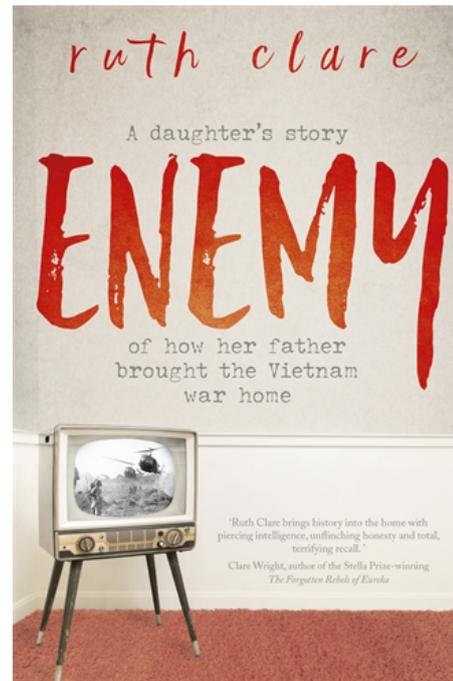
## PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9780670079094 (paperback);  
9781760141844 (ebook)

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## Enemy

Ruth Clare

## PLOT SUMMARY

Ruth Clare's father came back from the Vietnam War a changed man: a violent, controlling parent and a dominating, aggressive husband. Through a childhood of being constantly on guard, with no one to protect her but herself, Ruth learned to be strong and fierce in the face of fear.

After escaping her difficult upbringing, Ruth went on to have a family of her own. Facing the challenges of parenting brought her past back to life, and she lived in fear that she was doomed to repeat her father's behaviour. Wanting to understand the experiences that had damaged her father, she met with other veterans and began listening to their stories, of war, conscription, returning to civilian life. What Ruth uncovered left her with a surprising empathy for the man who caused her so much pain and heartache.

Weaving a striking personal narrative with a revelatory exploration of the effects of war, *Enemy* is a bold, compelling and ultimately triumphant memoir from a hugely impressive new Australian writer.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Clare was born in Brisbane, raised in Rockhampton and now lives in Melbourne. She has been a professional writer since 2004. *Enemy* is her first book.

## INTRODUCTION

Ruth Clare has bravely shared her experience of what it was like growing up as the daughter of a traumatised Vietnam Veteran. The dual narrative shifts between adult Ruth who is terrified that her parenting will mimic the anger, violence and rigidity of her own childhood, and child Ruth who is living the daily terror of life in an abusive family. Both narrative threads have Ruth as the first-person narrator and it is quite remarkable that this damaged little girl turns into such an articulate and reflective woman. The birth of her own children and her son's hitting tendencies shine the spotlight on her childhood.

Ruth is paralysed by the fear that her own parenting has been so profoundly affected by a childhood filled with tension and violence that her children might end up victims of a cycle of controlling through fear and physical violence. It is this fear that leads her to find out more about her father's wartime experience. Despite the pervasive effect the Vietnam War has had on her father and subsequently her family, Ruth knows very little about the reality of life for these kids that were sent off to fight for their country.

As she begins to hear stories of the military training, the horror of jungle warfare, the long-term effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the shame that was associated with the Vietnam War, she develops an understanding of her father's behaviour that begins the healing process. Perhaps the element of her relationship with her father that is the most difficult to reconcile is not the violence, anger, impossible expectations or disappointment, but is actually the fact that despite all of this, Ruth still loved him.

*Domestic violence happens in all communities, cultures and socio-economic groups. The prevalence of this issue in our society means it is inevitable that some students will have had some very similar experiences to Ruth. Teachers are advised to introduce this text very carefully and with an awareness of the needs of their students as some will find the content distressing. Whether they have suffered physical, emotional, financial or social abuse at home, this text may be*

*painful and confronting for them to study in a classroom. It could also be healing for them to know they are not alone in their experience.*

*The other element of this text that may need careful introduction is some historical information around the Vietnam War. The memories and experiences shared by Vietnam veterans on the frontline and their return to Australian soil are confronting. It would be worth inviting students to do some of their own research into ideas about conscription, Australia's involvement in the war, PTSD and how it varied from other wars our country sent troops too.*

### Questions

1. Before reading the Oxford Dictionary definition of the word 'enemy' Ruth includes at the beginning of the text, ask students to create their own definition. Perhaps they could create a word board together with all of the words, symbols, adjectives and examples of 'enemy' that come to mind. Review the provided definition and post somewhere in the room as a reference point. Look up other definitions for the word and discuss Clare's choice for including the three definitions she chose.

## CHARACTERS

### Ruth

As the protagonist of this heart-wrenching account of an abusive childhood, Ruth recalls her violent and painful childhood. The birth of own children, and the hitting her young son engages in, send her spiralling into despair as she fears the cycle of violence and fear will continue. It seems the past she has long left behind can never be forgotten. Rather than bury her memories further down, she instead begins to investigate what caused the man who should have loved her unconditionally, to instead cause her so much pain. The physical weight of her unborn baby is mirrored with the psychological burden of becoming a parent.

As Ruth comes to feel the sense of absolute love for her baby, she is struck by the significance of the hurt her father caused. What could possibly have happened to him to re-wire his natural nurturing tendencies to cause such violence and pain? It turns out that serving in the Vietnam War did exactly that. Interspersed between tales of terror, fear, panic and rejection she experienced repeatedly as a child, is the slow realization of the impact her father's time serving his country had on him as an adult and a



father. She learns, and is violently reminded, of the rigid and unforgiving expectations her Dad had for his family. Ruth's childhood is not one filled with warmth, love and acceptance, but a series of broken rules, an unpredictable father and a mother paralysed by fear.

Ruth refuses to let her vulnerability define her. She resists, reinvents and survives. There is no one to protect Ruth; she must do it herself. And at the same time protect her younger brother, older sister and mum. Ruth has to find something within herself time and time again to deal with the resentment, rejection and eventual abandonment from her father. Once he finally leaves, Ruth is relieved. Until the unforeseen toll on her mother reveals itself and the children are left to fend for themselves.

In all this time, through all of the abuse, both physical and emotional, no other adults come to her aid. She hides the horrific burns from even the grandmother she adores and when reveals to her teacher why she cannot pay for the chocolates is only met with shock. No one intervenes; no one stands up for her. The fact Ruth survived at all is remarkable; her ability to rise above the worst of situations and achieve her absolute potential is simply stunning. Her choice to show her father compassion for his own torment rather than focus on what was taken from her is nothing short of heroic.

### Activities

1. Read the last paragraph on page 247. This is one of the many perceptions Ruth has of herself. It is part of her defence mechanism to find the strength deep within herself rather than rely on the outside help or support of others. Use this image, or choose another that she shares within the text and draw a self-portrait of Ruth.
2. This memoir gives us the luxury of hearing from adult Ruth. We are privy to her voice, perspective, reflection and survival strategies. Have this adult Ruth write a letter to herself at a point in her childhood that she really needs to know it will all turn out okay. What might she remind her of? What strategies would she share? What perspective would she offer? Who would tell Ruth to rely on?
3. Write the conversation Ruth would have had with either her siblings or mother when she decided to write this text. What might they have asked to include or leave out? How might they have felt about this book being published?

### Kerstin

Despite being two years older than Ruth, Kerstin doesn't always seem to be the eldest child. From Ruth's point of view, it seems that Kerstin is happy to retreat and hide. She is always on Ruth's side, helping her through so many of her catastrophic injuries to avoid the wrath of their father. Their bond is forged out of survival and protection. Ruth describes watching her siblings get hit as worse than experiencing it herself; especially if it is because of something she has accidentally done to attract the wrath of their father.

As they get older, Ruth seems to take charge. She is the one who defends her mother and runs to get help. She is the one who suggests they go to the women's shelter. She is the one who chooses to stay and finish school without either parent for support when she is still a teenager. Kerstin seems to somehow forge a relationship with her father as time passes, relaying information about Ruth as her father enquires. This only further fuels Ruth's suspicion that she is the favoured daughter. She will never forget the stark difference between the way their father remembered each of them for their fifteenth birthday. Ruth cannot understand how Kerstin "risked opening herself up to him like that" (p298). But when her money is stolen from her bank account Kerstin encourages Ruth to ask their father for help.

Kerstin herself has relied on their father repeatedly throughout the years since he left home and despite Ruth's reluctance, she agrees. Kerstin is right, he is happy to help Ruth. Both girls are at home with their father when he passes away, but it is not Kerstin that Ruth turns to for solace, it is actually Brenda's son and his revelation is significant in her healing process. Whether she shares this information about his continued abuse with Kerstin, readers are not privy to. Whether it changes the way Kerstin sees her father we don't know. It is Ruth's story after all.

### Activity

1. Kerstin is a complete different person to Ruth. As far as we know she is not challenging the school principal and organizing a Year Ten Formal that the school has refused permission for. Nor is she practicing her screaming in the middle of the oval as a form of self-defence. She is self-sufficient though and remains in Rockhampton with just Ruth rather than return to Brisbane with her mother. Choose one event in the narrative that Kerstin is present at and



write it from her perspective. How does she feel about her parents? What is it like being the eldest child in a family that suffers constant abuse? What are her strategies for dealing with all of this?

### David

Four years younger than Ruth, David is born into an established routine of control through fear and punishment through violence. While Ruth does her best to protect him, it is impossible to escape the unrelenting wrath of their father. He is far too young to defend himself against his father's temper and has no way of protecting his sister or mother. David loses both of his parents at a much younger age than his sisters. He too may have felt the relief that Ruth experienced once the trepidation, fear and violence might have finally left their house. But when his mother retreats into herself and finds her only solace in alcohol, this eight-year-old boy has lost both of his parents. The children are left to fend for themselves.

Where Ruth is self-reliant, determined and capable, readers never really know what impact this has on David. He is only nine years old when he is woken in the night to the sound of his dad viciously attacking his mother. He is forced to flee next door, protected by older sister Ruth once again. He refuses to leave her side when she offers to return to the house to protect her mother. He is forced to spend a weekend in a woman's shelter with only his sisters to look after him as their mother goes back to the man she has met. His sisters look after him until it is assumed he returns to Brisbane with his mother to stay at his grandparents' house. Perhaps David has some chance at a childhood the girls are denied. All Ruth tells us is how much he has grown when she catches the train to see her mother and David once she finishes Year 12.

David returns to his father's bedside to say his last goodbyes and returns to his job in Brisbane just before he passes away. It is hard to know whether they had any kind of relationship, or whether the distance enabled them to talk without the threat of violence looming over them.

### Activity

1. Re-tell one of the events in the text through David's eyes. He may have had a slightly different experience or remembered something that Ruth didn't mention. It may be when he was a young boy, the domestic disturbance, a

camping trip, his father's death, or a different part of the event that Ruth doesn't include. Try and capture his voice and how he felt toward other members of his family.

### Dad (Doug)

The antagonist and the subject of this memoir is Ruth's beloved father Doug. Their tortured relationship consumes Ruth as a child as she desperately seeks his approval and attention. But this heartbreaking account reveals time and time again how any attempt to forge a meaningful relationship is poisoned by his traumatised psyche. He cannot love and accept his children for who they are; he is far too damaged to maintain any kind of normal fatherly bond.

As a young man of only twenty, he was unlucky enough to have his number come up in the fateful game that was conscription. He was sent to a foreign land to not only witness some of the worst atrocities human kind have been known to inflict on one another, but also to actively engage in perpetrating some of them. No one came home from that war unscathed, and worse still, the shame they faced when they returned to the very country that had sent them there in the first place caused such trauma, that very few recovered. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder had not even been identified as these young men tried to return to lives and families that had no understanding of the horror they had experienced. And as Ruth discovers, their brains had been re-wired to enable them to survive. The subsequent impact on the wives and children of these soldiers was catastrophic.

Doug is unpredictable, impatient, abusive and violent. But to the men he served with and the adults who had not seen this hidden rage he was frequently applauded for his greatness. Ruth, David and Kerstin are often reminded just how grateful they should be to have this man as their father. But as their little bodies bruise with another assault, this seems a very bitter pill to swallow. Doug has warmth and charisma that makes him charming to so many people, and it is this side of him that makes Ruth's life even harder. She can't hate him or reject him. Instead she finds herself repeatedly seeking out his help, his attention, his love, blaming herself for his violent outbursts and promising to be perfect so that he has no reason to get angry with her.

This love she has for her father, despite all of the emotional and physical pain that he has caused her, enables her to forgive him. She seeks out other vets



and hears their stories as a salve for her lifetime of hurt. She tries to understand what would cause a man to inflict such pain on the very people he was designed to love the most.

Doug dies of cancer, most likely caused by Agent Orange, the chemical used as part of the war effort. The Vietnam War has taken their father from them once and for all, but not before causing irreparable damage.

### Activities

1. One of the really difficult elements of the violence in this family is the fact that Doug doesn't remember it. It seems to be another cruel twist of fate that Ruth is left psychologically scarred by the memories of her father beating her and her siblings, but he seems to escape any of this. Write a series of letters from Ruth to her father and his subsequent replies explaining some of the trauma of her childhood.
2. Draw a life size version of Doug on butcher's paper on the floor. Divide him in half and label one side with the public version of Doug that other people know and see. Consider how their grandparents view their son, the men at the RSL, his students, etc. The other side is the private, hidden version of Doug. This is the one not only seen by Ruth, David, Barbara and Kerstin, but also by Brenda and her three sons.

### Mum (Barbara)

Barbara is the other adult in this family, but in many ways, seems to be another one of the children. She has absolutely no power over any decision made, and is completely held hostage by the violent rage that consumes Doug frequently and unpredictably. She does nothing to protect her children from the violence of the man she married other than the occasional warning or intervention.

The children adore their mother and Ruth in particular often puts the welfare of her mum before her own sanity and safety. It seems that the years of psychological abuse and the emotional torment of never really knowing what mood Doug will come home in has reduced Barbara to survival mode. Any attempt to celebrate occasions, have an opinion, or maintain a household is met with disdain and humiliation. When she discovers his affair with Brenda, she is crushed. The tears start and seem to never stop. Her only way of coping is drinking.

One of the most shocking and saddening aspects of this text is the lack of support this family had from anyone outside. It seems the grandparents either knew and ignored it, or had absolutely no idea. Bystanders and strangers in the caravan park they frequented continued to turn a blind eye and any of the adults at these barbecues Ruth refers to do nothing. Mrs. Harper calls the police at Ruth's insistence, but readers are left to wonder if she has ever heard anything that may have come from her neighbour's house before then. The vicious attack after Doug finds out that Barbara has been seeing another man is humiliation at its worst. Under the threat of having her eyes scooped out with a piece of metal, she is forced to say the words 'I'm a slut who fucked a man I just met' to her young children. And what happens in the minutes between Ruth calling the police and them finally arriving, haunts her middle daughter for a very long time.

Unlike the children, Barbara would have had some knowledge of the horror of the Vietnam War and having known Doug prior to his service, it must have been heartbreaking to see how the trauma of his service continued to poison him. When he finally leaves, the impossible happens; her life gets worse. She drinks herself to oblivion. What little joy she had is completely wiped out with the alcohol and she gradually destroys her life.

### Activity

1. *He never hit Mum – though in a manner of years he would break that rule as well – instead, he drained her of self-worth: death by a thousand cuts. Snide little comments, rolling eyes and always that tone in her voice, the one that told her how worthless she was.* (p68)

Using this quote, create a visual representation of the dynamics of this family. Focus on Mum and how she might have been positioned. This could be a collage, a symbolic reflection, a family portrait or any other graphic style the students choose.

### Further Character Activities

1. Divide the class into five groups and assign a character to each group. In these groups they will complete a character analysis and become the expert on that particular character. They will complete the following tasks before the class is reorganized into groups with one representative from each character in each group.



- Character groups:
    - Read background information included above.
    - List five key events that shape or define that character.
    - Choose a symbol or motif that best represents them.
    - Select 10 key quotes.
  - Expert groups: Complete the following table relying on the expert in your group to explain most of the answers. These can be added to and discussed.
2. Hot seat: Returning to the original 'character' groups, the students choose one member of their group to go on the 'Hot Seat'. This student will answer questions put to them by the rest of the class and try and answer them as authentically as possible. The group could prepare their character by guessing the kinds of questions that might be asked and practicing some answers. Each group writes 3 fat questions to ask each other character. A 'fat' question has a large answer rather than a narrow yes or no answer.

## SYMBOLS

### **Unborn baby**

*To cause your children harm goes against the laws of nature. It is no small thing to be so wounded that you subvert the innate urges of your biology. (p28)*

This narrative is less about purging herself of the damaging secrets of her childhood and more about trying to come to an understanding of her father's terrible behaviour. Once she falls pregnant, the desire to protect this unborn baby is so pervasive that she cannot begin to understand how her father inflicted so much pain on his children. She starts to investigate just how toxic his time in Vietnam was and this trauma 'poisoned' his role as father.

### **Smell of starch**

*The air was full of the comforting smell of spray starch when I entered the house. I loved the world of order that spray starch represented. (p49)*

Ruth's world is completely unpredictable and out of her control. She uses these signs or mechanisms to calm herself down and help prepare her for whatever is about to happen. The smell of spray

starch is familiar and indicative of her mother at home, caring for them. It will completely disappear in years to come when their world is in utter disarray. Ruth is often in a state of panic, on the edge of that fight or flight response that ensures survival. She calms herself by counting objects, avoiding the cracks in the lino, chewing her lips and holding her breath. She has no one to turn to and has to create these strategies within herself to cope with the chaos that is inevitable in her family.

### **The school report**

*I was such an idiot. What Dad had said was true. (p53)*

Praise was so rare in her household that Ruth felt as though she had to be absolutely perfect to warrant any being directed her way. Her school report was pretty close to perfect, and mostly because of her dedication to the school project on Eucalypts. But it seems, even perfect is not enough for her parents. The crushing devastation she experiences when her father dismisses her excellent results as meaningless compared to the common sense of her older sister is completely overwhelming. This rejection fuels the self-loathing that consumes her and gives voice to all of the negativity in her life. She longs to be invisible.

### **The tent**

*When that tent came out, Dad entered military mode. (p64)*

The Callum family spent every holiday camping. However, they did not own the typical nylon tent. Theirs was an ex-army tent, enormous and strong and very difficult to put up. The beginning of every camping trip was the same; they followed Dad's order with military precision, or suffered the consequences. As there was no way any of them, including their mother could meet their father's impossible demands, the abuse would be sent their way. The tent symbolizes the way even their holidays were tainted with fear and trepidation of their Dad's unreasonable expectations and vicious temper.

The other element of their lives that the tent symbolizes is the knowledge that other people had witnessed the violence and done nothing. They didn't intervene, instead they averted their eyes, turned their heads and pretended nothing had happened.



**The hair brushing**

*Dad was actually being kind to me and I hadn't enjoyed it for a minute. I wished moments like these came in a different colour so I would know it was safe to enjoy them. (p94)*

The constant panic that comes from living with a father who lashes out over normal childhood behaviour leads to a very stressful daily existence. The hair-brushing incident is another of those examples. Ruth is petrified of how this will turn out, how she will disappoint or anger her father again and what the punishment will be, especially as she lays trapped and helpless with her hair spread out behind her. The fact that it was just a gentle moment between a father and his daughter exacerbates her torture. She missed the chance to enjoy the rare tender touch of her father and that seems to hurt her even more.

**The wax**

*We sat in silence as Mum served the roast nobody felt like eating. (p124)*

Ruth's Mum does her best to keep this family functioning as normal. In an attempt to create some fond memories, Barbara prepares Doug his favourite meal and sets the table with their best dinner set and cutlery. Ruth is allowed to light some candles and they all hide, ready to surprise their Dad for his birthday. But once again, his controlling behaviour and short temper poison what would have otherwise been a family celebration. He cannot see past the spilt wax of the good lace tablecloth. Nothing else seems to matter.

**The box of chocolates**

*Yeah, it was pretty bad . . . and the worst thing was while I was there someone stole the box of chocolates I'm meant to sell. I'm not going to be able to give you any money for them. (p239/40)*

One of the startling elements of this text for readers is how alone Ruth is. There is not one other adult in this text that steps in and defends her. For most of the narrative the abuse seems secret and hidden, but occasionally it must be obvious to the adults in her life and yet no one does anything. In fact, Ruth even has to defend her own mother from the violence and abuse from her father. She calls the police and makes the decision to take refuge in the woman's shelter. The box of chocolates provides momentary solace in a world tainted by threats, violence, disappointment and rejection. Even when Ruth finally reveals the truth about the level of

dysfunction in her family to her teacher, nothing happens. She is left to return home, alert and fearful, ready to defend her family when the next attack begins.

**The Year Ten Formal**

*The only thing that happened was that I realized I would rather organize a function for a hundred people than be told, for no good reason, that I couldn't do something I wanted to do. (p257)*

With complete lack of control over her home life, Ruth becomes the perfect student. She is clever, achieves high academic results and is voted as a leader by her peers. When the school principal denies her permission to organize a Year Ten Formal she completely ignores his instruction and organizes one anyway. She refuses to relinquish control. As the principal insists she abandon her plans and continues to pull her out of class to try and convince her, Ruth takes matters into her own hands. She knows what it feels like to be powerless and she refuses to allow school to become another place where she is manipulated and controlled by other people. The formal is a symbol of an inner strength and resilience this young woman has developed in the face of constant and severe adversity.

**The ghetto blaster**

*There could be no other way to look at it. Kerstin was worth a ghetto blaster. I was worth nothing. Less than nothing. To Dad, I was a piece of rubbish and a ticket destined not to win. (p269)*

Birthdays were not huge affairs in the Callum household. With little money and no extended family close by, the children had grown used to settling for small gifts and a simple cake. When Doug gives Kerstin a fancy ghetto blaster for her fifteenth birthday Ruth is awestruck. The fact that he has chosen and purchased a present that is not only expensive but so perfect speaks volumes about his feelings toward his eldest daughter. Ruth expects the same for her fifteenth birthday. She couldn't be more wrong. Not only is there no ghetto blaster, there is no gift. Her Dad forgot her birthday entirely. All she is given is a TAB ticket in a plastic bag. She can't help but compare her treatment with her sister's, and the result is more painful than any of the physical abuse she has endured at his hands.

**Activities**

1. Work in small groups to create a detailed exploration of each symbol. Students need to draw a visual representation of their symbol,



find three relevant quotes and create three fat questions for the rest of the class to answer on their symbols. Each group rotates around the groups and the students answer each other's questions and record the visual representation and selected quotes.

Stick each visual symbol on the front of a box. The quotes are written out and cut into strips and distributed to the students. They then take it in turns to read out their quote and choose which box they think it belongs to. Check the boxes and reorganize as required. Visually display the symbols and quotes in the room for easy revision. Other symbols can be used or added to the list above as required.

1. List of all the key symbols in the text. Create a visual representation of each one. On flashcards list as many of the emotions Ruth experiences throughout the narrative. Allocate one emotion to each student and arrange the symbols on the floor. One at a time students can take their emotion and place it next to the symbol they think best represents the emotion and explain why. Record the final arrangement. This is excellent revision for an analytical essay on imagery and literary devices.
2. Ask students to create a list of as many examples they can find in the text of descriptive language and imagery, searching for techniques such as: metaphor, simile, analogy, descriptive language, imagery, motif, symbol. There are some quotes below to get you started.
  - *Yet some days it still dragged behind me like a sack of drowned kittens. (p27)*
  - *I knew this new thread between us was tenuous. Any moment I could pull in the wrong direction and make it snap. (p47)*
  - *I wished moments like these came in a different colour so I would know it was safe to enjoy them. (p94)*
  - *Every part of me was a bruise and my skin was stretched so thin, the merest hint of someone's gaze would be enough to pierce it and make my insides pour out onto the floor in a useless pile. (p270)*

## THEMES

### Vietnam War and PTSD

At the centre of this memoir is the damaging legacy of the Vietnam War. As the daughter of a returned serviceman, a Vietnam Vet, Ruth has no idea what impact this had on her father and subsequently his family. As an adult, Ruth starts looking for some answers and her conversations with other men who served at the same time as her father reveal some horrific truths.

The notion of conscription, PTSD and the shame and blame that was directed at the men when they returned were never spoken about in Ruth's family. Indeed, as a society, we barely know about The Battle of Coral; a conflict that lasted twenty-six days and saw over a hundred men wounded. These men were selected by the government by chance, sent away against their will, endured the stuff of nightmares and then returned home with barely any acknowledgment for the sacrifice they had made. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was not even identified as a condition until 1980 and it seems that the conditions these men were subject to in both their training and service in Vietnam created the perfect set of circumstances to create it.

The more Ruth discovers about PTSD, the more she can see her father. Symptoms include being easily angered, often detached, hyper-vigilant, cut off from friends and family, numb and lacking in empathy describe this man she had come to fear. His experience had transformed him, but no one bothered to tell him that.

### Domestic Violence

The symptoms of PTSD that Doug is consumed by lead to a home life filled with rage and violence. The children are aware of the ever-changing and completely impossible list of rules they must follow to avoid angering their father. But they are children, and his completely unpredictable nature results on frequent and brutal beatings. Barbara lives in the same fear, too frightened to have thoughts of her own and act of her own accord, she spends her life either warning the children not to set their father off, or preventing him from taking that particular punishment too far.

Ruth describes the atmosphere, not as walking on eggshells, but as walking on landmines. The next explosion is inevitable and possibly deadly. Doug mostly saves his anger for the children, but even



setting up the tent at each of their camping trips is enough to ensure a barrage of abuse for everyone. Barbara is trapped. There is no way she can leave this man, and it seems she actually doesn't want to. When the affair is revealed and Doug decides to leave her torment increases. Abandoned and completely bereft, Barbara starts drinking to soothe her pain and in a few short weeks, the children are left without either parent present enough to adequately care for them.

### Alcoholism

One of the truly shocking tragedies of this memoir is the inability of Barbara to function once Doug leaves the family. She is completely and utterly devastated by the revelation that he has been having an affair and after months of arguing he leaves his family to live with Brenda. Ruth's mother cannot function. In the first few days after he packs all of his belongings, clearly never to return, Barbara does not move from the couch. She is bereft. The children do the best they can to comfort their mother and support her, while trying to look after themselves. However, the days turn to weeks and it soon seems that this horror becomes the new normal.

The children look after themselves most of the time. Occasionally Barbara drags herself from the couch, swaying from the effect of the booze and cooks them a basic dinner. When Ruth doesn't bother to tell her mother she has been in a car accident, it becomes obvious that these kids have learnt to cope on their own. The loving, gentle, supportive and kind mother they knew and loved seems to have disappeared. As their father left, it seems the version of their mother they knew has gone too.

Mostly, Ruth, Kerstin and David seem to cope just fine with this new arrangement but when a boy at school questions Ruth about her mother's drinking, she strikes back. The shame makes her lash out and inflict pain in an effort to cover her own. Attempts at Alcoholics Anonymous and even a move back down to Brisbane with her parents can't break the stranglehold the bottle has on her. It is so sad as a reader to watch Barbara unable to enjoy for even one moment the freedom from a life of fear and abuse, one can only imagine what that must have been like for her children.

### Survival (Resilience)

Ultimately this is a tale of survival. Ruth exemplifies the ability to look inside oneself and find the strength to persist, to survive, no matter what. She

faces the greatest adversity a child can, a home filled with danger and unpredictability and she turns herself into the best possible version of herself that she can. Ruth protects her younger brother and her mother as much as she can. She calls the police when she is faced with the horrifying possibility that her father may kill her mother if she doesn't get some help and when the police arrive it is Ruth who makes the decision to go to the Women's Shelter to seek refuge.

As a student she is among the top in her class and excels at performing. She has mastered the art of disguise and manages to secretly fight her battles without calling on anyone else for help. As a mother Ruth is again faced with things out of her control, but her past experience enables her to look deep within herself and this time find the compassion and forgiveness she needs to move on with her life.

### Activities

1. There are some really contentious discussion points that may arise for students in this text. It may help students to discuss them by placing some distance between their own personal response and a more analytical one. One way to do this is through an organized debate. Students could be given the side of the topic to argue and have to present one argument and one rebuttal that lasts no more than one minute. Students could use the 'donut' approach where two concentric circles are created with the chairs. Students sitting on the inside circle have to argue one side first and then students on the outside circle can present some opposing arguments.
  - Ruth is right to forgive her father.
  - Doug should be held accountable for his actions.
  - The government failed in its responsibility to the young men who served in the Vietnam War.
  - Barbara is the most damaged character in the narrative.
  - There are many bystanders in this memoir that should have done more.
3. As a simple revision task, students are given ten minutes to write on one of the themes listed above. They may read the material, discuss briefly with a partner and then spend ten minutes



writing their own understanding of the theme citing specific textual evidence.

4. Create a book trailer using whichever program is suitable for the students in the class. They must choose one theme to focus on and choose quotes, music and visuals accordingly.

## CLOSE READING

Divide the class into seven groups. Each group then work through the following activities for their allocated close reading section.

1. Read selected pages.
2. Highlight key quotes.
3. Note key events of this section.
4. Read notes and answer questions as provided above.

Once they have discussed their answers with their group and agreed on the appropriate response, they create a short engaging learning activity for their peers to complete. It may be poetry, a visual task, a game, a creative writing task, a debate, a discussion or an activity using ICT.

The class work through the close reading sections either by reading the selected passage for homework prior to class, in class as a whole, or silent reading at the beginning of the lesson. The group then talk through some of the key quotes they find and invite students to share their answers to the questions through class discussion. Once completed, the group leading the discussion explains the learning activity and it is either completed in class or for homework.

### Opening pages (p 3–13)

The opening chapter of *Enemy* is told from the perspective of adult Ruth. She introduces readers to her father without judgment or condemnation, only with reference to his time served in the Vietnam War. The following chapter tells a completely different story. With adult recollection, Ruth takes readers back to her first memory. She is three years old and her dad is hitting her. There is no denying this is confronting and graphic, but with almost clinical detachment, Ruth recalls not just that first memory of being in trouble with her father, but what was the beginning of a childhood lived in constant fear. It seems much worse is yet to come.

5. How do you feel when you read the opening lines of page 5? Why does Ruth begin her story this

way? Are you surprised after having read the previous chapter?

6. Which part of this recollection do you find the most difficult to read? Why?
7. Describe the voice of Ruth as she narrates her childhood. She is not actually three years old, but this narrator is quite different to the adult one of the opening chapter. Why is this different? Why can't she actually be the child telling the story?
8. How does the end of this chapter establish the narrative?
9. List all of the words used to describe her father and his behaviour.

### Chapter 8 (p43)

For the first time, and possibly the last, Ruth's father offers to help her on her school project, He takes her on an adventure into the bush and share with her his knowledge of the native gum trees. She soaks up every bit of the warmth and attention he shows her and works so hard on the project that she gets 40/30. When her school report arrives shortly after she is desperate for some recognition of her excellent achievement. Once again she left heartbroken.

1. What is so significant about this time spent together in the bush?
2. Why does she work so hard on the project? What does she hope it will achieve?
3. There is a sense of impending doom throughout the chapter – can you identify where this come from?
4. What is the most devastating aspect of her parents' reaction to her school report?

### Chapter 17 (p102)

Ruth receives a phone call from Ollie, a veteran who had served at the same time as her father. He also had PTSD for many years before any diagnosis and was "cranky, crappy, used to yell at (his) daughters all the time over nothing" (p102). Like her father, Ollie had been conscripted and Ruth considers the tragic repercussions for these men, and their families, who had the misfortune of having their birthdate selected.

1. List the features Ollie attributes to PTSD. Which of these are similar to Ruth's father?



2. Define conscription. How would the government have justified this action? What was the truly tragic outcome for men who were conscripted to fight in the Vietnam War?
3. What is most poignant comment Ollie makes about his time in the war? Why did you choose this?
4. Explain the events surrounding the Battle of Coral. Why do Australians not know more about this battle?
5. Have Ruth's feelings toward her father shifted at all? What has the greatest impact on her in this chapter?

### Chapter 24 (p143)

*I was sure I had thought about his rules for a lot longer than he had. If he actually wrote down each and every thing he expected from us, he would see how impossible it was to do what he wanted.* (p146)

The fact that Ruth can recite all 23 rules that Dad seems to require is indicative of just how terrified she is of her father. These rules also show how unreasonable he is and how inevitable it is that these children will do something to upset him. Punishment is unavoidable, especially as the rules keep changing and depend entirely on his unpredictable moods. Ruth only solution is to try and be perfect and then she would "never get in trouble, ever again." (p150)

1. Why does Ruth bother to mention the argument her parents have about Ruth's mother needing to find a job?
2. What does she replace the metaphor of walking on eggshells with? Why is this so much more accurate?
3. List all of the contradictions in the current rules of the house.
4. Is there one rule that seems particularly unfair?
5. What is Ruth's solution?
6. What does this chapter reveal about her mother and the relationship Ruth has with her?

### Chapter 39 (p221)

Woken from sleep at 2am, David and Ruth follow the muted cries for help to the kitchen where they see something children should never have to witness, let alone fix. Their father was drunk and was physically attacking their mother. He had her pinned to the

ground. After forcing her to say to her terrified children; "I'm a slut who fucked a man I just met", he threatened to "scoop her eyeballs out with this bottle lid." The look in his eyes indicated he truly meant it. Ruth and David rang next door to Mrs. Harper's to call the police. Once the call had been made, she refused to let Ruth and David return to the danger of their house. This felt like torture to Ruth, terrified her father would kill her mother before the police arrived.

1. This is a deeply confronting chapter. What are Ruth's immediate concerns? How does she react to the scene in front of her?
2. David is only nine when he witnesses this attack on his mother. How does Ruth look after him as well as take action?
3. Find and list some of the imagery and descriptive language Ruth uses to describe the scene in front of her.
4. Did Mrs. Harper do the right thing by preventing the children from going back to the house?
5. What is so ludicrous about describing the scene as a 'domestic disturbance'?

### Chapter 46 (p263)

The next time Ruth sees her father after he breaks into their house and assaults their mother is on her fifteenth birthday. Two years earlier her sister Kerstin had received the very impressive gift of a ghetto blaster. Ruth had been waiting for her turn, sure her father would buy the same gift for her. Not only does the gift fall short of her expectations, but her father forgets it is even her birthday.

1. How does Ruth hide her disappointment at the present her mother gives her?
2. Ruth says; "Generally I tried to keep my expectations in check". What does this reveal about their family traditions and the way Ruth protects herself?
3. What is so hurtful about the present he gives her?
4. "The hurt flooding through me was worse than any physical pain he had put me through." What does this reveal about Ruth?
5. What are the two images Ruth uses to describe how she feels on page 270?



## Chapter 51 (p291)

24-year-old Ruth narrates this chapter. She has flown to Rockhampton to be with her father in his last days. Her mother flies up from Brisbane to say goodbye to the man she loved for so many years and her alcoholism is blindingly obvious. It seems, however, that this is the first that Douglas has known of it. Ruth's fury at losing her mother as well as her father all those years ago can only be controlled by starving herself. She refuses to fill their final days together with fighting.

1. Why does his euphemism 'on the turps' infuriate Ruth so much?
2. Why does she deny herself food? What does this method of coping reveal about Ruth's character?
3. How does she respond to Jacob's revelation that her father had beaten Brenda for all those years?
4. Explore the complexity of the final two paragraphs of this chapter. What is so poignant about this summary of their relationship?
5. How does the final sentence make you feel? Does this explain her approach to finding about her Dad's past and wartime experience? Does it explain her compassionate feeling toward her father that helps her heal?

## FURTHER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### **Research and presentation on the impact of The Vietnam War**

Students can work in groups to choose one facet of The Vietnam War. It may be PTSD, Conscriptation, the return home of the soldiers, statistics on how many people it affected, one of the key battles that took place, the type of warfare and how this differed from other wars Australian soldiers fought in or another aspect chosen by the students. The form of the presentation needs to be designed by the students and careful consideration given to an appropriate audience. For example: a presentation created for school students by the Australian War Memorial.

### **Ruth speaking to new mothers**

Ruth has a very specific set of circumstances that affect her as a new mother. But that is not to say that her concerns are not shared by a lot of other new mums. Imagine she has been invited to share her story with other women who experience trauma in their lives. What advice might she give them?

What has she learnt from her past? What approach has she adopted and how does that help?

### **A letter to her 15 year-old self**

This has become a common practice for many writers now to share advice with their teenage self. Ruth has a unique experience that exacerbates normal teenage difficulties and yet she makes no excuses and always demands the best from her self. With the beauty of hindsight consider what adult Ruth, who features as the secondary narrator in the text, might say to her younger self. Write this letter.

### **A creative writing task at school exploring one of her dreams**

Allow students the freedom to choose any style of writing exploring one of the dreams Ruth describes in the text. They might use the imagery and emotion she describes to write a poem, song, short story, diary entry, feature article, speech etc.

### **Book trailer**

In small groups, students create a book trailer for Enemy. Show some examples first and discuss some of the key quotes or events that might spark interest and make for interesting Book Trailer. They can use a program that suits their needs and add music, graphics etc. Share with the class.

### **A short story**

'The Camping Trip'

'A box of chocolates'

'The two-faced father'

'The Island'

Using the inspiration of one of the above titles, students can mimic the style of writing Ruth employs, or they can write in their own personal voice. The story can be fictional, based on their own experience, or borrowed from some part of the text. The more adventurous the better.

### **Lessons for her children**

Part of Ruth's reflections as an adult and a parent is a consideration of what she wants her children to learn. She reflects on how resilient she became as a result of the parenting she experienced and wonders how she can pass this on to her own children. Write a piece on the lessons she hopes her children learn based on Chapter 41 p242 and encourage students to add their own to this list.



## WORKSHEET 1: Essay Questions

1. *“It would never stop hurting that we had not come to a place of real relating while he was alive, but at least in exploring Dad’s war I had soothed my blistered rage with the balm of understanding.”*

Ruth’s healing comes solely from her ability to offer compassion and forgiveness to her father. Discuss.

2. *“But worst of all was the deep throbbing dread that he might be right. Maybe there was something wrong with me that made me unlovable. Maybe I deserved to be punished just because I was alive.”*

The emotional trauma of an abusive childhood takes Ruth much longer to recover from than any of the physical abuse. To what extent is this true?

3. Barbara suffers the most of anyone in the text. To what extent do you agree?

4. Ruth is more a survivor than a victim. Do you agree?

5. *“Always in the back of my mind a question burned. Was this it? Was this the moment I handed down the legacy and scarred them for life?”*

Ruth is tormented that her parenting will mirror the terrifying childhood she had. Eventually she is successful in breaking the cycle. Discuss.

6. ‘The dual narrative of Enemy gives readers a sense of hope as they are constantly aware of how this traumatised little girl becomes a brave, capable and reflective woman.’ Discuss.

7. ‘Ruth Clare’s use of symbolism and imagery enables readers to effectively empathise with her suffering.’ Discuss.





## ORDER FORM

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Before You Forget	Julia Lawrinson	9780143574071	8-12	\$19.99		
Are You Seeing Me?	Darren Groth	9780857984739	8-12	\$19.99		
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