



RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 14–18; years 9–12

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Australia's engagement with Asia
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Ethical Understanding; Intercultural Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Talking about mental illness
- Examining writing styles – voice, literary allusions, experimenting with chronology
- Analysing how language and writing evoke mood, tone, tension and characterisation
- Discussing moral and ethical dilemmas
- Encouraging critical thinking
- Encouraging creative and imaginative writing

THEMES

- Mental illness: depression and anxiety
- Suicide
- Family and relationships
- Social stereotypes
- Intercultural understanding

PREPARED BY Random House Australia

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The Pause

John Larkin

ABOUT THE BOOK

One moment. One pause. One whole new life.

Declan seems to have it all: a family that loves him, friends he's known for years, a beautiful girlfriend he would go to the ends of the earth for.

But there's something in Declan's past that just won't go away, that pokes and scratches at his thoughts when he's at his most vulnerable. Declan feels as if nothing will take away that pain that he has buried deep inside for so long. So he makes the only decision he thinks he has left: the decision to end it all.

Or does he? As the train approaches and Declan teeters at the edge of the platform, two versions of his life are revealed. In one, Declan watches as his body is destroyed and the lives of those who loved him unravel. In the other, Declan pauses before he jumps. And this makes all the difference.

From author of *The Shadow Girl*, winner of the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards 2012 Prize for Writing for Young Adults, comes a breathtaking new novel that will make you reconsider the road you're travelling and the tracks you're leaving behind.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Declan O'Malley is a Year 11 student. He attends a selective boys' high school with his close friends Chris and Maaate. After finally getting up the courage, Declan introduces himself to Lisa Leong, a girl from a nearby school who he sees on the train platform every day.

Declan and Lisa begin a relationship, which must remain clandestine because of their different cultural backgrounds and the fact that Lisa's parents would not approve. Conversely, although Declan is distant from his father and sister, he is extremely close to his mother, who is his hero.

When Lisa's mother learns of their relationship she does everything in her power to break it up – culminating in Lisa being sent to live with her aunt in Hong Kong.

Unable to bear the pain of separation and the anxiety that goes with it, and with no contact coming from Lisa on her arrival in Hong Kong, Declan sees no way out of his desperation and depression.

The book's title, *The Pause*, comes from the moment Declan is about to jump in front of a train with the intention of committing suicide. Here the narrative splits in two: in one reality Declan jumps and is killed, and continues to narrate from a place he calls 'non-space'. Not only is he tortured by the consequences of what he has done, he has to endure and bear witness to the life he might have lived had he stuck around – for the life he would have led is played out in a parallel reality.

In the parallel reality Declan pauses at that moment and collapses onto the platform. We see what would have happened: hospitalisation and treatment for his depression and anxiety, with the support of his shocked family; a return to school and the reactions of his friends; a reunion with Lisa in Hong Kong; and even beyond as Declan grows up, a changed person after the experiences he has gone through. We also learn about the tragic event in Declan's childhood that has contributed to his state of mind, and see Declan finally come to terms with the events that have made him who he is.

Despite the darkness of the subject matter, there are moments of levity – and an uplifting ending which this synopsis will not reveal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sydney-based author John Larkin was born in England but grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney. He has, at various stages of his writing career, supported his habit by working as a supermarket trolley boy, shelf-stacker, factory hand, forklift driver, professional soccer player and computer programmer. John has a BA in English Literature and a MA in Creative Writing. He now writes and teaches writing full-time.

John is available for talks and workshops for schools and community groups. Contact The Children's Bookshop Speakers' Agency for details: thechildrensbookshopspeakersagency.com.au or phone 02 94818811.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

John Larkin says:

I often draw inspiration from real life for my novels – for instance, *The Shadow Girl* began to take shape after I met a student who had lived on trains, as my character does.

The Pause is even more personal. A few years ago, I went through a complete mental breakdown and spent several weeks in a psychiatric hospital, and *The Pause* was born of this awful period in my life – a period that I didn't think I would ever get through. Declan's story is, in many respects, my story – though told through the eyes of a teenager.

When I was in the psychiatric hospital and on my way back to health, I saw a news item about a guy, in similar circumstances to mine, who had committed suicide. I remember thinking, if he'd just got some help, if only he had reached out, if he'd paused . . .

The writing process had begun.

I would be horrified if this novel was considered a suicide book. It is the antithesis of that. The reason for writing this book was to try to get it into the hands of anyone who might be vulnerable. To show them that life does get better. That we need to pause. I wanted this to be a book about hope and the beauty of relationships.

In writing and researching *The Pause*, I talked to a lot of people who have lived through and with anxiety and depression. I found that it was much more prevalent than I had thought.

We will all go through dark times but we have to ride the dark times out, and to seek help if it all



becomes too much. Because if I have learned one thing from this journey, both as a patient and an author, it's that we can't go through depression and anxiety alone.

Life is – and will be – beautiful.

John Larkin

MULTIMEDIA SUPPORT

- Watch the **book trailer** for *The Pause* at: <http://youtu.be/LkDGRqbOXBI>
- Watch an **interview** with John Larkin about his inspiration at: http://youtu.be/K2_lqEuzRcY

RAISING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

The Pause is an important book not only for its literary merit and possibilities for study in the English classroom, but for its underlying messages about mental health. As a society, we need to be able to discuss mental health openly and without prejudice.

Here are some statistics from the Youth Mental Health Report issued in June 2014 by Mission Australia in association with the Black Dog Institute:

- '21% of young people surveyed were experiencing a probable mental illness'
- 'Over 60% of young people with a mental illness were not comfortable seeking information, advice or support from community agencies, online counselling and/or telephone hotlines'
- 'Young people with mental illness were around five times more likely to express serious concerns about depression (57% compared to 11.5%) and suicide (35.3% compared to 6.8%)'

Source:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/newsroom-page/media-releases/item/522-one-in-five-young-people-struggling-with-mental-illness>

The Pause can be used as a way of introducing a discussion around mental health and helping to reduce the stigma young people may feel around talking about problems they may be facing.

Getting help

If you or someone you know is going through a tough situation that you don't feel comfortable talking about with friends or family, you can find

help elsewhere. Reach out to a counsellor on a free anonymous hotline or website.

- www.beyondblue.org.au or 1300 22 4636
- www.kidshelp.com.au or 1800 55 1800
- www.lifeline.org.au or 13 11 14

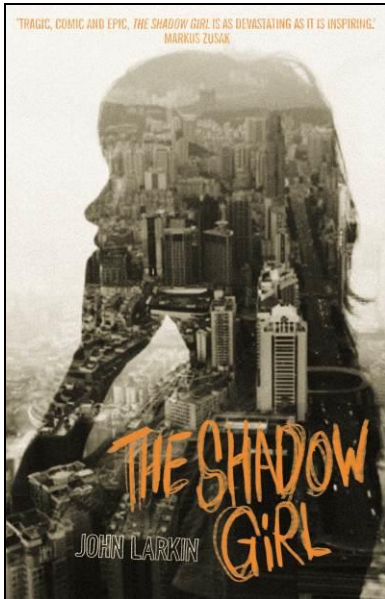
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Was Declan's breakdown preventable? What were the factors that contributed to it?
2. Declan's story contains examples of strategies you can use to help you recover from, and manage, mental illness. What strategies did Declan use? What else could he have done that might have helped?
3. *'I thought I would be stuck with this agony forever. But I just had the wrong mixture of chemicals whirring around in my brain. But how was I to know? . . . My mind was broken. And when your mind breaks you need help. External help. Because the thing you rely on most to get you through the screaming darkness is the very thing that's broken.'* (p. 40) Declan's brain sends his body pain signals, so that he feels as though his nerves are rupturing, but in reality his pain is caused by a chemical imbalance that is contributing to his depression and anxiety. In what other ways can our brains deceive us?
4. How significant do you think Declan's family and friends were in his recovery? Or do you think that his recovery came from within?
5. *'I'm sorry to you, my teachers, who might have blamed yourselves and wondered why you hadn't spotted the signs – signs that simply weren't there, signs that only became apparent to me after it was too late, after I was gone. Signs that I'd learnt to hide from everyone – myself included.'* (p. 185) Do you think there were any signs of Declan's mental illness? Do anxiety and depression manifest themselves differently in teenagers versus adults?
6. *'My friends have been amazing since I returned to school, but everyone else has given me a wide berth. It's just too much to deal with. I'm kind of like a social leper.'* (p. 183) Why do others find it difficult to talk to Declan after his breakdown? Have you experienced this in your life? How can we create change in our society so that mental illness can be discussed openly and honestly, and without discrimination or stigma?

7. *'Blokes don't do this stuff very well, but to compare, teenage boys are so clenched up we make our fathers look like Oprah.'* (p. 183) Do you agree with Declan that teenage boys are less likely to show their emotions and talk about their problems than others?
8. Declan's mother shielded her husband from the truth about what Great-Aunt Mary tried to do to Declan. Did she do the right thing? Would Declan's relationship with his father have been different if his father had known the truth? What other secrets in the book contribute to the suffering or emotional wellbeing of the characters?
9. *'Life is about enjoying the little moments . . . We're all going to fall on bad times and go through sadness, through breakups, through death, bereavement and depression. It happens. It's a part of life. But those moments will pass and you'll have good moments again. You'll have great moments. You'll have beautiful moments.'* (p. 145) Should we be happy all the time, or do we need to experience sadness and a range of emotions in order to appreciate the 'beautiful moments'?
10. Humour is an important part of Declan's story, and plays a role in his healing. How important is humour to you in your life?
11. Can humour also be destructive? (For instance, when Declan and his mother make fun of Declan's father?) What is the difference between healing humour and destructive humour?
12. Look up Don Ritchie, the real-life 'angel of The Gap', who saved many lives by offering a cup of tea and someone to talk to (as 'Bill' helps to save Declan, and tries to save Mary, in the story). Do you think Don saw himself as a hero, or was he just doing what anyone would do in his situation? What other strangers, as well as health professionals, help Declan in *The Pause*?
13. Why did John choose to use a writing structure for the novel that splits into two alternate narratives?
14. Explore the chronology of the novel and discuss why scenes were included and the order in which they were recounted. Why did the author make these choices?
15. Why did the author choose to write the book in first-person and (mostly) present-tense? What are the limitations of a first-person narrative? What are the benefits of this approach?



FURTHER READING FROM RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



The Shadow Girl
by John Larkin

The shadow girl never imagined she'd live on the streets. After her parents disappear, life with her aunt and uncle takes a sinister turn. Terrified that the authorities will believe her uncle over her, she flees. She tricks her way into a new school and pretends to have a loving family. No one knows she sleeps in rail yards, sand dunes and abandoned houses. At school she meets the author she will call on years later. Together they piece together the story of how she survived, who helped her, and the friend she wishes she could have saved.

Winner of the Victorian Premier's Prize for Writing for Young Adults 2012



If I Stay
by Gayle Forman

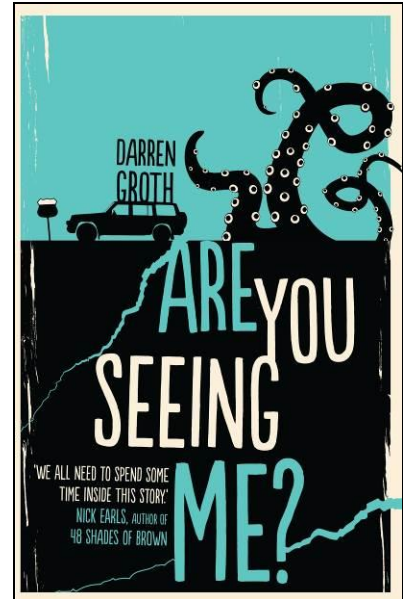
What would you do if you had to choose? A haunting novel about the power of love and loss – a story that won't quite let you go.

For seventeen-year-old Mia, surrounded by a wonderful family, friends and a gorgeous boyfriend decisions might seem tough, but they're all about a future full of music and love, a future that's brimming with hope.

But life can change in an instant.

A cold February morning . . . a snowy road . . . and suddenly all of Mia's choices are gone. Except one.

Haunting, heartrending and ultimately life-affirming, *If I Stay* will make you appreciate all that you have, all that you've lost – and all that might be.



Are You Seeing Me?
by Darren Groth

Twins Justine and Perry are about to embark on the road trip of a lifetime in the Pacific Northwest.

It's been a year since they watched their dad lose his battle with cancer. Now, at only nineteen, Justine is the sole carer for her disabled brother. But with Perry having been accepted into an assisted-living residence, their reliance on each other is set to shift. Before they go their separate ways, they're seeking to create the perfect memory.

But the instability that has shaped their lives will not subside, and the seismic event that Perry forewarned threatens to reduce their worlds to rubble.

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Pause	John Larkin	9780857981707	9 – 12	\$19.99		
The Shadow Girl	John Larkin	9781864718751	9 – 12	\$18.99		
If I Stay	Gayle Forman	9781909531239	9 – 12	\$19.99		
Are You Seeing Me?	Darren Groth	9780857984739	9 – 12	\$18.99		
TOTAL						

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