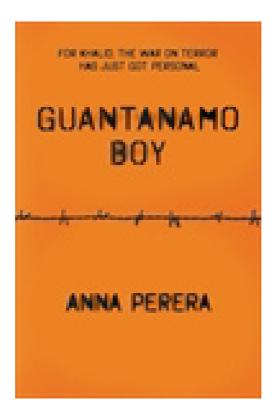
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TEACHING NOTES

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Guantanamo Boy by Anna Perera Teacher's Notes by Dr Pam McIntyre

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'The idea for this teenage novel first came to me when I attended a gig at the Globe theatre two years ago, which was a benefit for the charity, Reprieve, which fights not only for the rights of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay but for those on Death Row in America. When Clive Stafford-Smith said that children have also been abducted, abused and held without trial in this notorious prison, I was so shocked and appalled that I felt myself driven to write this story.

This nightmare glimpse of the terrible price paid for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, takes you inside Guantanamo through the experiences of Khalid, an ordinary lad from Rochdale, Lancashire, who likes playing football down the park and hanging out with his mates ... I felt the book had to be written ... I like Khalid, his family and friends, and his ordinary adolescent struggles. I rooted for him and a justice system that has been ripped apart and abandoned to the four winds – as I hope you will when you read his story.' Anna Perera.

'The descriptions of [Khalid's] experiences in Kandahar and Guantanamo completely overwhelmed me like no other book/ article I have read ... the raw power of this book completely filled my mind as I was reading it and lingered long after I put it down ... I will be urging my students and colleagues to read this book – I hope that despite the horror and terror so vividly portrayed they will feel the gentle strength and humanity of Khalid as I did.'

Jane Brockway, Howell's School, Llandaff, Cardiff.

Synopsis:

The story opens six months after the events of 9/11. Khalid, a fifteenyear-old Muslim boy from Rochdale, Manchester, is abducted from Pakistan while on holiday with his family. Accused of being a member of al-Qaeda, he is taken to Kandahar, tortured until he 'confesses', and then to Guantanamo Bay where he is held as an 'enemy combatant' without charge or trial, for two years. What happens to a fifteen-year-old boy whose self-identity is British, whose language is English and whose identity is denied him? How do you retain your sanity and belief in humanity when you tell the truth and yet are tortured, kept solitary in a cage, become a number – 256 in Khalid's case – and are denied access to any proper legal processes? This is a harrowing and confronting reading experience - as it should be - and requires considerable discussion. Children have always suffered in war, and in this book, war is not an adventure: it is brutal, unjust and dehumanising. The reader finds it hard to read about man's inhumanity to man, but individual acts of humanity save Khalid when it seems he will be lost. It is the governments that perpetuated such injustices and those which were complicit and acquiesced that most outrage us. This is an important book about a particularly dark period in contemporary society, one deserving of examination.

Guantanamo Boy is well supported by resources, and the author details her sources of information in writing it. It may be that some readers will require the contextualising these resources provide, before, rather than during or after reading. They are listed at the end of these notes. Australian readers will make connections with David Hicks.

Characters:

This is Khalid's story and we see it through his perspective, so that other characters come to us only through him.

Khalid:

- Fifteen-year-old Khalid attends Rochdale High, Manchester. His father is from Pakistan, and is a chef at a vegetarian restaurant in town. His mother works in the office in the local primary school. She was brought up in Turkey where she didn't wear the headscarf. They are a Muslim family, who are not actively religious. Khalid has two younger sisters Aadab, six and Gul, four.
- P14: Khalid and his friends hang out in the park, doing a bit of roughhousing, smoking, drinking, and playing five-a-side footy. Khalid is a keen supporter of his local Rochdale football team.
- P78: Describes what Khalid feels about himself 'an ordinary kid from Rochdale. He's OK at football. If he works hard he gets decent grades at school. He isn't bad-looking, but none of his features is amazing'. Consider that the author has given us a boy we can feel for. He is not deeply religious. Would we react differently to him if he were?
- How does he keep himself sane during months in Kandahar prison in those wire cells? Ask students 'do you think you would have been able to survive?' Have them imagine themselves in prison there, and share the different opinions on how they think they would have reacted.
- P132: After he hears he is going to Camp Delta at Guantanamo, Khalid appears to break down and is tortured using sleep deprivation and water-boarding.

Masud:

- Aged forty-eight has been tortured by Pakistanis under American orders.
- P89: He has traded in Afghanistan for years buying goods to sell in his shop in Cairo. Like Khalid, he is in the wrong place at the wrong time, has overstayed his visa through illness and is accused of being an 'enemy combatant'. He is sent to Kandahar for processing.
- Khalid thinks he meets him in the showers at Camp Delta.

Abdul:

- P115: Abdul is a Lebanese maths teacher working in Pakistan. He
 is accused of making a bomb so, on the advice of his wife, flees to
 Afghanistan. Another example of bad timing.
- P126: He is accused of being a spy and is tortured. When he shouts 'Death to America' he is taken from his cell and never returns.
- P116-117: He tells Khalid about some of the many English words that come from Arabic. Did you know this? Find other examples.

Ali Abaza:

- Twenty-eight years old, is a Ghanaian lawyer who is multilingual and well-travelled in the West as well as the Middle East. He is devout so arouses suspicions and is accused of aiding fundamentalists.
- P221-224: He gives Khalid a history lesson on the culture and influence of Islam, particularly on the western world. Students might like to pursue this in more detail through research.
- The reader is also given occasional insights into Muslim values, such as (page 5) helping your mum shows her respect; (page 80) that the patterns on the carpets mean 'many patterns but one unity'. Consider this in terms of the book, and as a philosophy of life.
- P180: Zakat is the Muslim duty of charity to help people in need.

Stages in the plot:

The plot is carefully built to establish the normality of Khalid's life in England. It is a friendly, multicultural neighbourhood. However, we are aware that innocent computer games, especially ones called Bomber One set across six countries, and played by gamers in Egypt, Iraq, Australia, the US, can be seen as sinister in times of irrational suspicion and fear. Khalid talks to his cousin, Tariq, in Lahore on line in a frequently ambivalent relationship. Khalid is not interested in the Muslim sacred sites that fascinate his cousin.

- The portrait is of an ordinary family, in an ordinary street. However, (pp11 13, p26) Khalid notices growing hostility towards Muslims in the neighborhood. Khalid's group of friends are not racist, but there are 'steroid heads' on the estate eleven year olds with shaved heads, who act hard, bully old ladies.
- P19-20: The family plans to go to Karachi for the Easter holidays as Khalid's grandmother has died. This event highlights a gap between Khalid's father and himself. They find it difficult to talk to each other, but there is deep love between them.
- P28: The shopkeeper, Nasir, warns Khalid about US soldiers arresting young men in Karachi for no apparent reason, and paying locals large sums to report people. We are further alerted to danger for Khalid.
- P29: Khalid thinks 'our whole family's more British than anything else ... I'm only fifteen'. Is this a reasonable assumption that such factors will be protective? Do you feel reassured?
- P38: The family arrives at the relatives' home in Karachi, and (p42) Abdullah begins to visit, urging Khalid's dad to go to the mosque, but his father doesn't like him. Are you suspicious of him? Why?
- P42: Khalid finds the people are more polite and friendly than in Rochdale.
- P45: Events escalate when Khalid's father goes missing. Khalid searches for him and on page 47 is caught up in a protest of some sort. He joins in the gestures to make his way through more easily. Discuss how carefully the circumstances are built up so that we see a picture of why Khalid might be in danger and under suspicion: how innocent circumstances can be made sinister by paranoia. Or are we being shown how easily we can construe innocent acts as suspicious?
- P49: Jim, the Liverpudlian, also warns Khalid about the CIA paying for the identification of suspected al-Qaeda operatives. How do you feel about the ethics and efficacy of such a strategy? Khalid's father is not at the address given and everything becomes strange and threatening.
- P57: This feeling is heightened when Khalid finds Abdullah on the computer. Abdullah knows Khalid has been playing games with Tariq in Lahore.

■ P60: He suspects Abdullah knows more about his father's disappearance — are you suspicious too? Or is Khalid becoming paranoid?

Khalid's abduction:

- P62: Khalid is suddenly, shockingly, abducted from the house. Discuss who the students think is responsible. Has he been betrayed? Who knew where he was?
- His confusion, fear. How would you react? What would you do? What would you feel? Before Chapter 6 is read, have the students predict what will happen. Have them write a short piece showing how they would be feeling if they were Khalid, in either verse or prose, or in an email to a friend, or a text message.
- Where is he taken? What kind of people are so brutal? How can he have 'no legal rights in Karachi' (p67)?
- 'Tell us what you know and you can go home'. What do they think he knows?
- Because we follow Khalid, we have no idea what has happened back at the family house. What do you think has happened? What is Abdullah's role? Does the family suspect him? What do they say and do? Write or act what you think has happened.
- P67: Why isn't Khalid allowed access to the British Embassy? He is a British citizen. What is the responsibility of the British Government here?
- P70: An American woman and a MI5 agent ask him about being in Afghanistan, and at the demonstration. The MI5 won't help him. How can the Americans be so powerful? Why won't anyone check his story? Consider that the chapter title is 'Power'. What is the author suggesting about power here? Why did she name this particular chapter 'Power'?
- P74: Khalid is interviewed by two more Americans, and he tells them again, the truth. Why don't they believe him?
- Khalid is sent to Kandahar on a plane with many other Muslim men and two other boys.
- P77: The gentle guard is sympathetic but can do nothing. Why are

- good people so cowed? What is the real fear of terrorists or the Americans?
- P95: Khalid is taken to Kandahar, and in prison is guarded by Americans who vary from nasty to 'almost human'.
- P112: His isolation is exacerbated when he can't speak the language of his fellow prisoners.
- P120: The Red Cross comes but does nothing except provide for letter writing. They appear to have no power research the Red Cross. What is its mission in these circumstances? The man who visits writes a report to his superiors about what he found in the prison. With a partner, write that report. At home that night, he tells his wife what he saw. Write that conversation. How do they differ?
- P121: Khalid's letter arrives at home. Describe, act or create in graphic novel form, the reactions of his family.
- P124: Months have gone by and it is now September 2002 and Khalid is in the routine of imprisonment.

Chapter 13

- Read this chapter aloud to get the full effect of the way it is presented.
 Discuss how differently you would read it if it were presented conventionally. Rewrite it and see. Read it aloud again.
- P146: Is Khalid losing his mind? What is his purpose in remembering all the wrong things he has done?

Torture:

- P149: Khalid is subjected to water torture after sleep deprivation, and the playing of the computer game with Tariq is the subject of interrogation.
- This is graphic writing and we experience the horror with Khalid as he thinks he is going to die. They will continue until he confesses his part 'in the worldwide bombing campaign you planned with known accomplices.'
- P153: He confesses: 'all he can do is wipe his weeping eyes with a damp wrist and give up on everything, on life, on the whole of mankind'. He believes the lie that if he signs he can go home p155. Why would he believe this when it defies logic?

- Under international law, are confessions gained under torture accepted as evidence? Do some research.
- Khalid feels humiliation at not being able to resist the torture, and then anger when he sees clearly his torturers for what they are. Does this allow him to resist becoming the subjugated victim?
- P158: He seeks for a reason to keep living. He has a very strong spirit. Where does this strength come from, in an 'ordinary boy'?

Guantanamo:

- P171: The solitary nature of it no one caring, leads Khalid to despair and self-hate. He is struggling to know who he is anymore. Discuss the planned and perpetrated dehumanising nature of life in this prison. Men are a number, not a name; there is no sense of time passing; no useful activity; no social contact; little exercise. The only thing to do is read the Qur'an.
- P184: Khalid starts to self-harm though he doesn't know why. Why do you think? His grip on reality is loosening and he begins to hallucinate.
- P199: Khalid realizes how the interrogators operate.
- P202: He is beaten when he refuses to play their game, and loses physical control of his body (p205)
- Pp242-3: Khalid realises Tariq is in the next cell.
- P260: Meeting Tariq begins the healing for Khalid. Then he gets a letter from his father (p267), and a lawyer arrives.
- P281: Adopting his religion and praying gives Khalid a sense of peace. Students might like to discuss the role of religion in such circumstances.
- P286: Is his asserting himself over the interrogators a turning point? A shift in the balance of power?

Going Home:

- P292: Khalid is told he is going home. Paint, draw, act or write how he feels when he knows the whole community of Rochdale fought for his release (p297).
- Identify what effects his shocking two years have had on him, positive

- and negative.
- Are you hopeful for Khalid's future? Why or why not?
- Are you hopeful that all the inmates of Guantanamo will be properly treated, and will recover their lives? What have you read, seen or already know about this? Do you know anything about the Australian, David Hicks?
- What has happened since the change of government in the US?

Who do you think was responsible for Khalid's kidnapping?

- P163: Did Tariq betray him? Who do you think?
- Why do we never find out in the book?

Style of telling:

- Interspersed with Khalid's life in prison are his recollections of ordinary life at home with his friends. Consider why the author has done this and the effect on the reader. For instance, on page 108 he thinks about the consequences of missing school. He gives himself a plan to keep in control, to believe that he will get out and his life will go on. How important is this? Is it a lack of realism or necessary hope?
- Find other examples of this, such as on pages 192-195 and talk about their significance, and page 195 when Khalid thinks of all the things he hasn't done yet in his life.

Ideas:

This book raises fundamental issues about human rights, dignity, role of governments, individual and collective responsibility etc that are sure to arise in the reading and discussion of the book. Below are some ideas to start with, but readers are sure to want to focus on those that affect them.

• Innocent until proven guilty is a basic tenet of the rule of law. Why was it not applied for Khalid and the inmates of Guantanamo?

- P68: How can something of this sort happen to an 'ordinary family'?
- Khalid has been robbed of his adolescence. Will he ever truly recover?
- Pp166-7: Khalid remembers studying the Spanish Inquisition, and a discussion of torture in class: 'So what is the point of torturing someone if all you get is lies?' Have a debate about the value of getting information from 'evil people' through torture.
- P169: 'The heartbreak was that they didn't care about the truth'. How relevant is truth in this prison and political regime? How relevant is justice? It is not about truth and justice is it? But about power and pride? Or is it something else as well? Race? Religion? Consider the incidents of cultural humiliation, such as on page 120 being naked in front of other men 'worse than death'; the awful, unpalatable food does it contain pork? Do they care?
- P209: 'How can anyone spend their time making other people unhappy?' Discuss in the light of the guards, torturers and interrogators in this book, and in terms of the wider community.
- P214: Khalid is given books to read that become his family and connection to reality when he is danger of losing it. He particularly connects with *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (also a woman). Why might have Anna Perera chosen this book? Are there similarities in ideas and themes between Lee's book and her own?
- Why and how are books consoling and comforting?

Follow on activities:

This is a powerful personal, emotional and political reading experience that students might like to process and share through expressing their responses in a variety of ways:

- Through poetry. Perhaps some of the great Muslim/Persian/ Arabic poets could be read as examples, such as Rumi, Mirza Ghalib, and Allama Iqbal.
- Though multimedia, such as preparing a 3 minute trailer for the movie of *Guantanamo Boy* using Photostory etc. Students might like to choose both western and eastern music to accompany it.

- Through performing particular scenes in the novel; there are many powerful ones to choose from.
- Through researching organisations that are fighting for the release of prisoners, and for justice for them, such as Amnesty International and Reprieve.

Resources and further reading:

Some of the sources used by the author:

Enemy Combatant by former Guantánamo inmate Moazzam Begg
Guantánamo by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo (play)

Sicko by Michael Moore (film)

Bad Men by Clive Stafford Smith

Road to Guantanamo (film)

Further Resources

http://www.annaperera.com/ http://www.guantanamoboy.co.uk/

http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/mar/03/anna-pereraguantanamo-boy (an interview with Anna Perera)

Related reading/viewing:

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas by John Boyne
Home and Away by John Marsden and Matt Ottley
Once and Then by Morris Gleitzman
Torture Team by Philippe Sands
The President Versus David Hicks by Curtis Levy (documentary film)
Honour Bound by Nigel Jamieson (play about David Hicks)
http://www.theage.com.au/multimedia/hicks/main.html

A final word from the author...

'It's only through stories that we understand issues that are sometimes difficult to comprehend. To me, all books are devices that help people understand the world that they live in, appreciate it, and ponder their own existence. What I hope is that teenagers will see the similarities between themselves and issues that are on the news every day.' Anna Perera.