



# Teachers' Notes MARTY'S SHADOW

JOHN HEFFERNAN

Teachers' Notes by John Heffernan

*An unflinching tale of love, hate and lurking fears.  
Engrossing and darkly beautiful.* —Michael Gerard Bauer

## OMNIBUS BOOKS

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## INTRODUCTION

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*He had to run. To escape the voices. They weren't there yet, but they were coming. He could feel them. If he ran hard and fast enough he might be able to escape them a little longer. If he pushed himself until his thighs ached and his heart pounded, they might fall back and leave him to the peace and quiet of the hill ...*

This is a story of a loner, Marty, who lives on a small rural property with his brother and his father, a roo shooter who is largely absent during the week when the boys look after themselves. Of a macho household, the boys are both keen hunters and have hunting dogs and weapons and an old bomb called Hitler that they use to chase wild boar. Their mother, a drinker, has left a long time ago, although Marty's younger brother Jack, the eternal optimist, still hopes she will come back. Marty and his father know different: they have no illusions about life, although Marty is rather young to be so pessimistic.

Marty doesn't relate to anyone at school and is too often taken to be the monosyllabic low achiever that he projects to the world. But Nariah, a newcomer to the school and to the town, moves him. She is an outcast herself in this small white Australian community, because she and her family are from Iran and embrace the Bah'ai faith. Local racists at the school are harassing Nariah and her parents.

The story of Marty revolves around his growing friendship with Nariah and the gradually returning suppressed memories of the past. First he has disturbing dreams of strangers in the house at night and slowly the picture fills out to include the boys' mother and her lover, and the inevitable confrontation with her husband.

Marty's dreams soon become waking nightmares as he lurches from one violent imagining to another.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**John Heffernan** lives in northern NSW, where he ran a sheep and cattle property with his wife. His early training as a teacher has been invaluable in both his writing and in establishing a relationship with young readers. He is now a full-time writer. *Marty's Shadow* was an honour book in the 2008 CBCA Book of the Year Older Readers' category and was shortlisted in the young adult category of the 2008 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards.

## BEFORE READING THE TEXT

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1. Have a discussion with your students about the situation in Iran. Find out how much they know about the persecution of the Bahá'í and encourage them to visit the website of the Bahá'ís international community <<http://www.bahai.org/>> to find out more information.

Points for discussion

- People of Bahá'í faith are denied access to higher education in Iran. How would your students feel if they were refused access to universities in Australia based on their beliefs?
- Talk about religious prejudice in Australia and get students to speculate on the causes and why people are so intolerant of those with different belief systems.
- Have students ever witnessed religious persecution in their communities?
- What suggestions do they have for tackling prejudice and animosity?

2. Students could be asked to familiarise themselves with *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, both of which are mentioned in the novel. Introduce students to 'the Oedipus Complex' and explain its connection with *Hamlet*. Consider showing the film of *Hamlet*, so students can make connections when they are reading *Marty's Shadow*.

## READING THE TEXT

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Keep a reading journal and record your reactions to the text. Consider what you like and why and what you dislike and why. Make notes on characterisation, thematic concerns and structural devices. You could also include a timeline, a list of the characters as they appear in the book, names of places and a short description of chapters and important events.

## AFTER READING THE TEXT

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1. From the beginning, Marty is searching for himself – or at least for a kind of peace within himself. There is a huge blank space in his life – a black hole – rather like the gravel pit in the story with its dark deep water. The shadows are pieces of the puzzle Marty has to solve to discover the truth about his past.

Consider the adage, 'The truth will set you free'. Do you think this is a valid statement? Does finding the truth alleviate Marty's pain and provide him with a stronger sense of self or does it have the opposite effect?

**2.** Nariah and her family are also experiencing an identity crisis. Nariah describes herself as an Iranian and a Persian, but by settling in Australia she and her family can claim Australian citizenship too. People assume the Hadupal family are Pakistani, thrusting another identity on them. They are also defined by their faith, a religion that is persecuted in Iran.

Immigration causes a displacement of identity. Consider how much of your identity is tied to where you live. How do you characterise your identity? What would happen to your identity if you weren't accepted in the place you call home?

**3.** One of the ways in which Marty will ultimately survive is through belonging. He is floating in limbo and has been for many years with no connection to anything.

How do Marty's actions demonstrate a need to belong? What do trees represent to Marty and why do they have such an important role in the novel?

**4.** Marty is a prisoner of the past, and the mysteries of his childhood threaten to overwhelm him and his sanity. Nariah has her own demons to contend with, as do her parents. 'Parts of the past never leave you,' she says.

Compare how Marty and Nariah deal with their pasts.

**5.** Marty is also a prisoner of his mind. He has been alone and introspective for too long. Like Hamlet, Marty's thoughts torture him, distorting the past and confusing the present until his very grip on reality is in danger. Hamlet is often compared with Oedipus, who also shares characteristics with Marty. Marty, like Oedipus, is both driven *and* chased, not only by his own thoughts but by his past – both can spur him into action or paralyse him, making Marty his own worst enemy.

During the course of the novel, the class study *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, two of Shakespeare's well-known tragedies. Do you think *Marty's Shadow* is a tragedy? How do you define a tragedy? Compare this with a dictionary definition. Are these conventions at work in *Marty's Shadow*? Is there hope at the end for Marty, or do you think he is incapable of being saved? To what extent is Marty responsible for his own actions? To what extent is Marty a victim of fate?

**6.** Consider the statement on the blurb, 'Not all families are safe'. This is particularly true of Marty's family – Marty has been abused since childhood. But it doesn't apply to the Hadupal family, who are a close-knit and loving unit. Marty and his brother are exposed to this type of relationship when they visit the Hadupal's for dinner. What does the word family mean to you?

**7.** Consider alcoholism and its effects on individuals and families. Life in rural Australia, where itinerant workers depend on seasonal work to support their families, is hard. How much does a family's economic situation play in creating an abusive environment?

**8.** Despite the singularity implied in the title, there are many shadows in the book. Consider the many types of shadows present. How many can you identify?

**9.** These two quotes are from the novel:

i) Not a person any more. Bodiless. A shadow. He'd become his own shadow.

ii) No up or down now, no distance or direction, no start, no end. Night sky and earth melded, the stars indistinguishable from the lights of Jarrah or the glow of Camberford. All part of one vast, indifferent shadow ...

Can you elaborate on the meaning of these quotes?

**10.** One reviewer read the novel as a story about the redemptive power of love. Do you agree with this assessment? Do you think love saves Marty?

**11.** Consider the structural devices at work here. A prologue and epilogue, narrated by the title character's brother, frame the novel. The story is divided into five acts. Why do you think the author has chosen to format his novel this way? What effect does it have on the reader?

**12.** Marty's need to nurture and cultivate plants seems at odds with his desire to hunt boars. What does each activity offer him?

**13.** Choose a religion you know little about and research it. Write 500 words explaining your findings.

## CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

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1. Choose an event in the novel and retell it from the point of view of another character.
2. Look for examples of imagery that convey a particular emotion – note the use of language to create a sense of menace. Discuss these passages and the devices the author uses to create atmosphere. Talk about the difference between metaphor, simile and personification. Use the examples you found in the text to create your own piece that projects a particular emotion.
3. *Marty's Shadow* is characterised by short, episodic chapters that create tension and suspense. Using this pattern, create your own short story.
4. Marty is haunted by someone from his past called the 'shadowman'. The name itself is revealing. Characters' names can play an important role in achieving an emotional response from the reader. Come up with a list of character names that evoke different emotions.

## EXTENDED READING

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If you enjoyed *Marty's Shadow* you may like to read one of these titles:

*Double Exposure*, Brian Caswell

*Talking to Blue*, Ken Catran

*Solo*, Alyssa Brugman

*Sleeping Dogs*, Sonya Hartnett

*Dreamrider*, Barry Jonsberg

*Del-Del*, Victor Kelleher

*On the Jellicoe Road*, Melina Marchetta

*Kill the Possum*, James Moloney

*Game as Ned*, Tim Pegler

*Mama's Trippin'*, Katy Watson-Kell

*Our Little Secret*, Allayne Webster

Excerpts from *Child Abuse Statistics Resource Sheet Number 1 2008*

(<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs1/rs1.htm>):

### **What is the prevalence and incidence of child abuse in Australia?**

It is generally accepted that there are four types of child abuse and neglect - sometimes referred to as child maltreatment. These are physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse and neglect.

There is no accurate information about the *incidence* or *prevalence* of child abuse in Australia. "Prevalence" refers to the total number of children who have experienced abuse or neglect at some point in their childhood. "Incidence" refers to the total number of children who experienced abuse or neglect during a specified time period. Such information is usually collected via a large survey of the population.

The most accurate statistics that are available about child abuse and neglect in Australia are the numbers of reports of suspected child abuse and neglect made to statutory child protection departments each year.

While these figures give some indication of the incidence (or numbers) of child abuse and neglect being reported to authorities in Australia, it is assumed that fewer cases of abuse are reported than are occurring in the Australian population.

In Australia, state governments have the statutory responsibility for protecting children from child abuse and neglect. Definitions of what constitutes child abuse vary across the different states and territories. Thus it is difficult to obtain consistent and comparable national statistics.

Since 1990, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has compiled annual national figures of the number of cases of child abuse reported to state child protection departments.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008) statistics can be found at: [www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10566](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10566)

### **How many reports of child abuse are made in Australia each year?**

The most recent national figures from the Australian Institute of Health Welfare indicate that in Australia, during 2006-07, there were 309,517 reports of suspected cases of child abuse and neglect made to state authorities. These figures have increased by over 50% in the last five years, from 198,355 in 2002-03. The figures do not necessarily mean that the actual incidence of child abuse and neglect has increased over this time, but they do show that the reporting of cases to child protection services has increased.

Table 1 shows that in 2006-07, 58,563 reported cases were substantiated.

"Substantiated" means that a case of suspected abuse was reported and investigated, and child protection authorities verified (on the balance of probabilities) that the allegation was true and the child was in need of protection.

**Table 1: Number of substantiations, states and territories, 1999-2000 to 2006-07**

Year	NSW <sup>(a)</sup>	Vic.	Qld	WA	SA	Tas. <sup>(b)</sup>	ACT	NT	Total
1999-00	6,477	7,359	6,919	1,169	2,085	97	233	393	24,732
2000-01	7,501	7,608	8,395	1,191	1,998	103	222	349	27,367
2001-02	8,606	7,687	10,036	1,187	2,230	158	220	349	30,473
2002-03	16,765	7,287	12,203	888 <sup>(c)</sup>	2,423	213	310	327	40,416
2003-04	n.a.	7,412	17,473	968	2,490	427	630 <sup>(d)</sup>	527	n.a.
2004-05	15,493	7,398	17,307	1,104	2,384	782	1,213	473	46,154
2005-06	29,809	7,563	13,184	960	1,855	793 <sup>(e)</sup>	1,277	480	55,921
2006-07	37,094	6,828 <sup>(f)</sup>	8,441 <sup>(g)(h)</sup>	1,233	2,242	1,252 <sup>(e)</sup>	852 <sup>(i)</sup>	621	58,563

### **What do the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare statistics tell us about the characteristics of children who are the subject of reports?**

In all jurisdictions, girls were approximately three times more likely than boys to be the subject of a substantiation of *sexual* abuse.

Boys were generally more likely than girls to be the subject of a substantiation for *physical* abuse.

The rates of substantiated abuse or neglect decreased as age increased. Children under one year old were the most likely to be the subject of a substantiated report of abuse or neglect, while children aged 15-16 years were the least likely.

Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were more likely to be the subject of substantiated reports than were other children. Across Australia, Indigenous children were more than 5 times as likely as other children to be the subject of a substantiation.

### **According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare statistics, who makes reports to child protection authorities?**

Anyone who suspects that a child is being abused and/or neglected or is at risk of being abused and/or neglected may make a report to child protection authorities.

Each state has its own legislation stipulating those people who are mandated by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. The requirements vary between each state.

The most recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare statistics show that notifications most commonly came from police, hospitals and health centres and school personnel.