



**RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA  
READING GUIDES**

## **Noah Barleywater Runs Away by John Boyne**

Random House Australia, November 2011

RRP: \$17.95

ISBN: 9781849920407

Reading Level: 9+

**COVER BLURB  
ABOUT THE BOOK  
ABOUT THE AUTHOR  
ON WRITING NOAH BARLEYWATER RUNS AWAY  
THEMES AND DISCUSSION POINTS  
FURTHER ACTIVITIES**

### **COVER BLURB**

In *Noah Barleywater Runs Away*, bestselling author John Boyne explores the world of childhood and the adventures that we can all have there.

Noah is running away from his problems, or at least that's what he thinks, the day he takes the untrodden path through the forest. When he comes across a very unusual toyshop and meets the even more unusual toymaker he's not sure what to expect. But the toymaker has a story to tell, a story full of adventure, and wonder and broken promises. And Noah travels with him on a journey that will change his life for ever.

A thought-provoking fable for our modern world from the author of the bestselling and critically acclaimed *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

NOAH BARLEYWATER is eight years old when he runs away to escape his problems and comes upon a strange toy shop in a magical forest.

Noah Barleywater senses that something isn't quite right at home. Rather than deal with his problems, Noah decides that it's much easier to run away. He takes an untrodden path through the forest and comes upon a magical tree, talking animals, and a very odd-shaped toy shop filled with wooden puppets. Even stranger is the toymaker who tells him stories of his youth—stories filled with adventure, regrets, and broken promises. And, along the way, the Old Man takes Noah on a journey that changes his life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Boyne was born in Ireland in 1971. He is the author of 5 previous novels, including the international bestseller *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*, which won two Irish Book Awards, was shortlisted for the British Book Award and has been made into a Miramax feature film. His novels are published in over 30 languages. He lives in Dublin.

## ON WRITING NOAH BARLEYWATER RUNS AWAY

### John Boyne writes:

#### Author motivation

“When I was about eight years old, the mother of a boy in my class died suddenly. I remember the incident vividly, the horror of death, the first time I had ever been confronted by it. My friend was out of school for a few weeks afterwards and when he returned I recall everyone in the class finding it difficult to talk to him. We were young, of course; we didn't yet have the emotional capacity to help someone who was grieving. But it went further than that. I can remember feeling almost afraid of him, as if to talk with him would be to enter a world of adult trauma that I was not yet ready for. There were incidents in class where he would suddenly become upset and have to be taken home, and these were just as frightening for me. The boy's mother had been young and healthy; if this could happen to her – and to him – then it could happen to me too.

I never forgot that boy or his visible distress and wanted to write a book that might be of help to children who have just lost, or know that they are about to lose, a parent. The resolution of the book, the final chapter, was the most important one for me as I wanted to leave the reader with a sense that although terrible things might happen, the person left behind can eventually accept and come to terms with their

loss, rather than allowing their life to be defined it. I wanted it to end on a note of hope.

## Writing process

This is the first novel I have written that does not have a historical setting so it did not require research in the usual manner. However, as it was my intention to write a modern fairytale, I went back to traditional fairytales – the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson – and tried to find common themes that ran through the form. Then I adjusted them slightly to give the story a more modern feel.”

## THEMES and DISCUSSION POINTS

- **FAMILY** - Describe Noah's relationship with his parents. What are the good things that he sees in his parents? Cite evidence that Noah cares what his parents think of him. The Old Man assumes that Noah's parents are bad since Noah is running away. Why does this notion upset Noah?
- **DEATH & DYING** - What is the first hint that Noah's mother is sick and maybe facing death? Discuss why Noah's parents don't tell him that his mother is dying. Ask students to talk about ways Noah's parents could have explained his mother's terminal illness to him.
- **PROMISES** - Noah tells the Old Man that his mother made him a promise. Then he says, “And I think she's going to break it. And I don't want to be there when that happens.” What is Noah's mother's promise? At what point does he realise that it will be broken? How does the Old Man's story of how he has lived his entire life with a broken promise help Noah?
- **COURAGE** - Ask students to discuss how it takes courage to run away, and courage to return home. Explain the Old Man's comment, “The point comes, after all, where it's too late to go home.” Noah thinks that if he goes back, he will have to face what comes next, and he is not sure if he is ready. How does the Old Man give him courage to return home and face his mother's death?
- **MEMORIES** - Ask students to explain why the Old Man finds it difficult to face the mementoes of his past. How do the puppets carved by the Old Man's father tell the story of the Old Man's boyhood? Discuss the memories that Noah's mother is trying to create for him. What might Noah say is his fondest memory of his mother?
- **MAKING CHOICES** - In the very beginning, Noah questions whether he is doing the right thing by running away. How does

he justify his choice? Explain why the Old Man says that he made the wrong decision to become a real boy. Why does he think he should have stayed a puppet? Discuss why the Old Man leaves the toy shop to Noah.

- **FAIRY TALES** - At what point does Noah realise that he has wandered into a magical place? Debate whether the forest and the toy shop remains magical once the Old Man is gone. Considering the elements of a fairy tale, discuss whether the novel is really a fairy tale or a work of fantasy.

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Have students write and illustrate a comic book of the Old Man's youth that Noah may sell in Pinocchio's Toy Shop as a tribute to the Old Man. Ask them to think of an appropriate title.
- Have the class summarise the story of Pinocchio. List the major scenes or events from the story as they are mentioned. Then have students take a virtual field trip of the sculpture garden in Pinocchio Park in Collodi, Italy, at the following website:  
[goitaly.about.com/od/tuscanypictures/ig/Pinocchio-Park-Pictures](http://goitaly.about.com/od/tuscanypictures/ig/Pinocchio-Park-Pictures).  
Have them write a response about the symbolism of each sculpture for a travel guide.
- Ask students to use Google Images or clip art sites on the Internet to view the many different images of Pinocchio. Then ask them to design a sign for Pinocchio's Toy Shop, using one of the images of Pinocchio as a model.
- Most fairy tales are short and have the elements of one-act plays. Divide students into groups and ask them to plot major scenes in the novel. Then have them write the novel as a one-act play. Each group should perform their play for the class. Then discuss how the each group presented the story differently
- John Boyne says this novel is a fairy tale. Discuss the elements of a fairy tale. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to read a classic fairy tale and analyse it based on the elements discussed in class. Ask the class to consider these traditional elements as they read Boyne's novel.