

# Darkness, Be My Friend

A JOURNEY BEYOND FEAR

## Exploring the Text

Check with your teacher about which questions to try.

- ① **'Life to be sure, is nothing much to lose; But young men think it is, and we were young' (p. 2).** What was the significance of these lines of the poem for Ellie?
- ② How much sympathy do you feel for Ellie as a result of her treatment by Adam? How typical is Adam of boys you know?
- ③ **'All our lives we'd been competing' (p. 17).** Ellie often refers to Homer's need to prove himself. Why do you think Ellie needs to compete with Homer?
- ④ Ellie was terrified of returning to Wirrawee and was very angry. **'I wasn't screaming at them; I was screaming at everything; at life, at the unfairness of it' (p. 18).** How do you rate unfairness? Do you consider there is something worse than that? Have you ever screamed at the unfairness of it all? Explain your answers.
- ⑤ Ellie suggested that the twelve army personnel had **'a sameness about them ... maybe they were picked in the first place because they fitted the mould that the army wanted' (p. 21).**
  - (a) Do you consider Ellie's statement a fair one?
  - (b) Can a person belong to any of the defence forces and still maintain her or his individuality?
- ⑥ **'I was thinking that this was where I belonged, this was my dreaming ... now that I was here I never wanted to leave it again' (pp. 39–40).** What do you understand by Ellie's 'dreaming'?
- ⑦ Ellie thinks about growing up and formulates a couple of theories (pp. 59–61). How would you rate the maturity of the friends? Give one example of immature behaviour and one example of adult behaviour. Give reasons for both.

Page references are to the Pan 1996 hardback edition of *Darkness, Be My Friend*.

- 8 'Lee was crying ... he was crying without letting himself cry.' Give reasons why this 'seemed so terrible' to Ellie (p. 63). Do you think this had the effect of stirring her feelings towards him. Why or why not?
- 9 'The world had shrunk to him and me' (p. 70). What is the connection between this shrunken world and Ellie's scream? What else does Ellie need to know to understand her reaction?
- 12 Being in the Hermit's hut put Ellie in a 'deep serious mood' (p. 85).  
 (a) Can a place have that effect? If this has ever happened to you, give details.  
 (b) Is there a part of you that is always alone? Explain.
- 13 Ellie's fear is so strong that the reader shares it (chapter 10). What is it in John Marsden's style of writing that allows us to feel the very essence of Ellie's fear?



- 10 Ellie stated that her friends were the one group of people she could trust as much as her parents. How do you rate your friends? Are there degrees of trust between you and different friends? Has your trust in someone ever been damaged?
- 11 Ellie is feeling more and more guilty about her scream (p. 81). Ellie stated that her scream was 'a kind of guttural noise ... more of a sob than a scream' (p. 71). Do you think Ellie caused the problem?
- 14 Explain the way Ellie very creatively used the horses and harnessed the fire to the friends' advantage. Give reasons why the friends, even after the 'screaming' episode, still looked to her to lead them out of danger.
- 15 Ellie was continually concerned about the morality of the killings: 'I knew I'd done those things because I wanted to stay alive ... But I wanted an answer that told me something more' (pp. 144–5). Assess her rationalisation. What would you say to her?

16 'I'm stuck with it [a sense of responsibility], and when I do something powerful, that I think might be wrong, I can't just shrug it off' (p. 144). How would you comment upon Ellie's sense of responsibility?

17 What possible conclusion could you reach to account for the missing Kiwis?

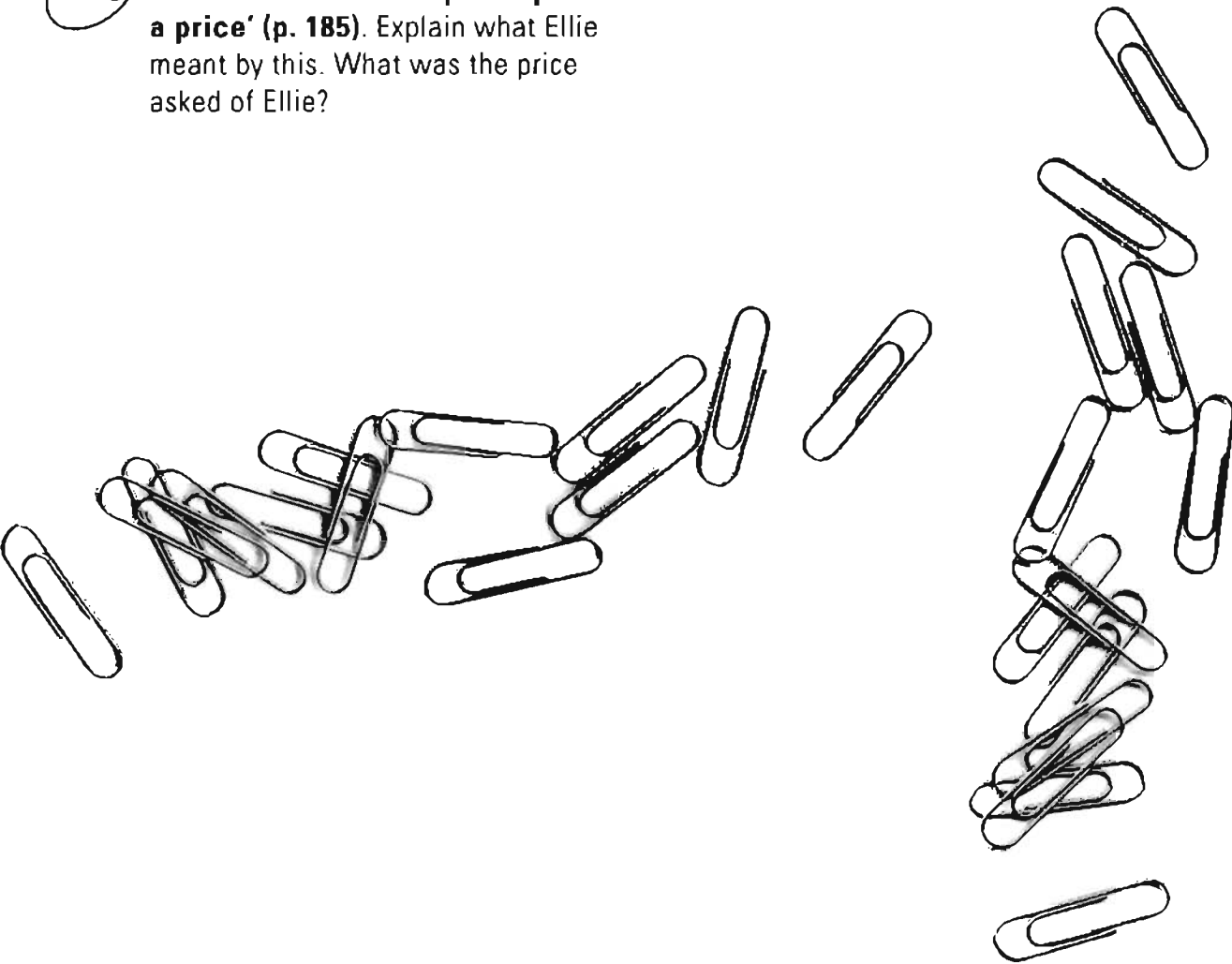
18 If you were one of the friends, how would you have judged, initially, the rightness of Lee's statement: 'It's my decision and it's my life. It doesn't concern anyone else' (p. 174)? Explain fully your opinion.

19 'Sometimes friendship has quite a price' (p. 185). Explain what Ellie meant by this. What was the price asked of Ellie?

20 How do you explain the myriad of feelings that stuck in Ellie's stomach (p. 188)? Where do your feelings stick?

21 Ellie stated that she was feeling 'Stronger than anger: rage. ... It was focused that night, like it had never been before' (p. 243). What is the cause of Ellie's rage?

22 The friends were very disappointed to learn that Colonel Finley could not, or would not, organise a pick-up. Fi and Ellie differed about his motives. Judge for yourself. Do you agree with Fi or Ellie? Justify your opinion.



# Think it through talk it over

In groups or as a class, discuss one or more of these topics.

## 1 Crying

Lee was crying. 'Silent crying. There's something awful about that' (p. 63).

Could Lee's feelings be more powerfully expressed to Ellie through his tears than through words?

Are there some times when crying is appropriate? Explain.

Do you feel better after you have cried?

**Are there times when it is not? Explain.**

**Are boys' tears more powerful than girls' tears? State reasons for your opinion.**

Crying can express many emotions. Name some.

**Does crying change as people grow older?**

## 2 Loneliness – being alone

Ellie went to the Hermit's hut to be alone. She began to realise that she had never felt more alone in her life (p. 86).

Is being alone the same as being lonely?

**If being alone is different from being lonely, what is it that makes the difference?**

Explain why Ellie felt that a part of her would always be alone.

Do you have to be alone to be lonely? Give an example.

**Can you be alone without being lonely? Give an example.**

## 3 Weakness

'The Hermit's hut was a strong place ... Somehow his [the Hermit's] isolation let him gradually lose his weaknesses' (p. 86). Ellie was continually concerned that she was weak.

Would you assess Ellie as a weak character? Give reasons for your position.

Was Ellie's weakness being 'burnt away' by the danger in which she continually lived?

**Do you consider Ellie to be strong enough for what lay ahead?**

## 4 My life or their lives

Ellie often thought about the morality of killing. 'So I thought – and still think – about whether it was OK' (p. 144).

Does Ellie's life matter more than the invaders' lives?

Is it right to kill to survive?

**Are there degrees of right and wrong? Explain.**

How would right and wrong apply in a life-threatening situation, like those Ellie had faced?

Evaluate Ellie's idea that one of the soldiers might one day have found a cure for cancer. Is this a reason for guilt?

## 5 The price of friendship

Ellie is reluctant to accompany Fi to meet her parents. "Sometimes," she says, 'friendship has quite a price'" (p. 185).

**What makes a friend?**

What makes a friendship?

Under what circumstances would you consider the price of friendship too high?

**If a friend asked you for more than you were prepared to give, would you say no to the request or to the friendship?**



John Marsden has used some very vivid images throughout this novel. Choose one or more of the following images then try an activity listed below.

- 'I waited for the others at the base of a little fortress of rocks' (p. 92).
- 'The leaves went into a frenzy, my hair was blown crazily around my head, my clothes billowed, and from the ground came a storm of dust and twigs. The roar of the chopper hammered at my ears' (p. 100).
- 'The whole conversation reminded me of butterflies, touching slightly and lightly on each leaf' (p. 111).
- 'Each time it was with the knowledge that these might be the feet bringing death' (p. 113).
- 'I sat in my ragged little patch of warmth by the creek' (p. 87).
- 'Apart from the quick thudding of the hoofs and the hot breathing of the horses there was not another sound' (p. 120).
- 'Angry hot clouds of smoke were billowing up in the air, black, grey and white' (p. 136).
- 'I could see the dark getting driven back by the headlights' (p. 219).
- 'Again we became shadows in the night' (p. 270).



**illustrate** Think of ways you could illustrate your image – think in abstract images as well as realistic ones.



**make a mobile** Write your favourite quotes on coloured paper and make a mobile.



**write a poem** Use one or more images as a basis for a poem.

**make a bookmark**

Choose a quotation to put on your bookmark and illustrate it.

