

Teachers' Notes

The Gateway: The Four Fingered Man

Written by Cerberus Jones

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont

April 2015

SYNOPSIS

Amelia has just arrived in Forgotten Bay, a sleepy small town on the coast. Her astrophysicist father and diplomat mother have taken over a decrepit hotel, which makes about as much sense to Amelia as her older brother James' sudden cranky mood. Everything about the Gateway Hotel gives Amelia the creeps, so she's more than happy to meet the energetic and hilarious Charlie, who shows no fear in the face of the mysterious and gruff caretaker Tom.

Nothing seems to add up about the staff or guests of the hotel, so when Amelia and Charlie witness Tom sneaking in and out of a guests' room, they know they have a mystery to solve. After taking on some sneaking themselves, they discover what Tom was looking for. Their guest Miss Ardman is keeping jewels in her room – wonderful, intoxicating jewels that make you happy just looking at them. Unfortunately, it does not make Miss Ardman happy to catch the kids in her room, as they soon find out!

None of the adults believe Amelia and Charlie about Tom's sneakiness, so when they spy him taking off towards his cottage with the jewels and Miss Ardman in hot pursuit, it's impossible not to follow. Tom's cottage is even messier than the hotel, but there are more important things to worry about. Miss Ardman is stalking Tom, ordering him to give up the jewels. It's only once she's pounced and taken them back that the truth emerges.

Miss Ardman is an alien, and the jewels are her eggs. Tom is the caretaker of the hotel, but also of the gateway, a portal underneath his cottage that leads to other planets. All aliens who wish to travel between galactic worlds must pass through the gateway. Even more concerning than this information is that Amelia and Charlie's parents know about the gateway, and are now employed by Gateway Control.

Welcome to the Gateway Hotel, where the intergalactic guests make every day an alien adventure!



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THEMES

As the first in an on-going series of books, this story is principally one of new beginnings and discovery. The central character, Amelia, has been lifted out of her old, familiar life in the city and is forced to start from scratch in the tiny beachside town of Forgotten Bay. Here she must navigate not only the displacement of moving into a new house, but also a new school, new friends, and a new dynamic with her parents, who are also starting over with a sea-change from their top-level jobs in science and diplomacy to taking over the rundown Gateway Hotel.

Initially overwhelmed and disoriented, Amelia quickly engages with Charlie — her equal, but opposite in many ways. Exploring the hotel together, they realise that it is full of secrets and oddities. And with each new secret, Amelia is led first to doubt, then to suspect, and finally to distrust her parents. What she knows of their character through being raised and loved by them is called into question by the things she witnesses first-hand. How can she reconcile hard evidence with what she feels to be true about her parents?

In the story's conclusion, Amelia is given the last pieces of information she needs to resolve the mystery. She is able to see that, with a different perspective, those same facts can be completely re-interpreted.

WRITING STYLE

The Gateway books are classic, self-contained mystery stories, though amplified with science-fiction styling. As such, each book focuses on a central problem or puzzle, gradually reveals clues chapter by chapter, and invites the reader to participate with Amelia and Charlie as they attempt to analyse the facts, use logic to form, test, discard and refine hypotheses, and finally resolve the mystery.

As Amelia and Charlie are quite different characters, with different perspectives on what is at stake, they often come up with different theories as one tends to zero in on an element that the other has overlooked or considered irrelevant. As they wrestle with the problem, and argue out their reasoning, so the reader is encouraged to develop their close reading skills - to interrogate the text, engage actively as the story unfolds, and see if they can solve the mystery before the characters do.



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AUTHOR MOTIVATION

As a collaborative project between three authors, *The Gateway* series attempts to synthesise our different strengths into a single, cohesive vision. We aim to balance meticulously detailed, high-drama plots with richly drawn characters in an established and believable world.

It was a deliberate decision to use science fiction rather than fantasy as our vehicle, as it not only ensures a more consistent, logical universe, but also raises the stakes for the central characters - there are real consequences in the world of *The Gateway*, and no magic spells to wriggle out of them.

Our ambition was to write books that:

- appeal equally to girls and boys. Amelia is the central voice, but Charlie is the loudest voice -- the two characters equally drive the narratives.
- show kids actively engaging with the world. Amelia and Charlie deal with each new situation with bravery, integrity, logic and empathy. Though the aliens that arrive through the gateway often are cause for fear, confusion and disgust, just as often they provide the kids with an opportunity to meet the *other* with compassion, generosity and respect.
- include healthy, honest relationships with adults. The usual trope in children's literature is to first clear away the adults through abandonment, death or disaster, and then let the adventure begin. The adults in these books, though, particularly the parents, are reliable sources of protection, resilience, and affection.

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Will be reviewed widely and available where all good books are sold.



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Learning outcomes

Students will:

- engage personally with texts, interpreting events, situations and characters,
- identify the ways in which language is used in imaginative texts,
- use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse information and ideas,
- experiment and use aspects of composing that enhance learning and enjoyment.

Before reading the book

Look at the cover. Do not open the book!

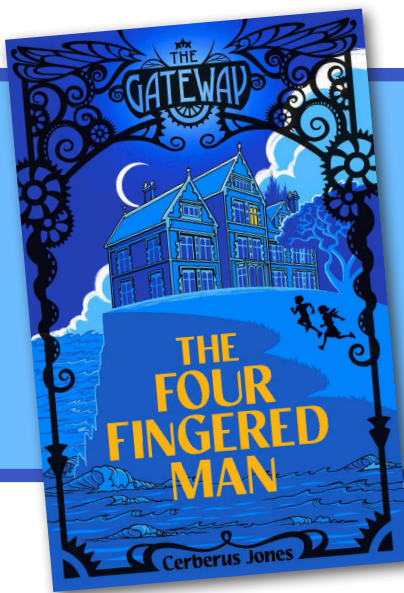
Use the following to prompt discussion:

1. The book is called 'The Four Fingered Man'. How might the man have lost his finger? Discuss and brainstorm.
2. Look at the illustrations. Are there any clues as to what the book could be about?
3. Read the blurb. What do you think makes a hotel 'creepy'? Where do you think the hotel guests are visiting from?

After reading the book

Use these questions as a guide for discussion:

1. Magnolia trees are mentioned throughout the book. What do they look like and are they significant? Explain.
2. Where is the book set? What clues are there?
3. Amelia referred to James at school and said that after 'Whatever it was happened' they moved to the hotel. What do you think happened?
4. Why is the place called 'Forgotten Bay'?
5. What could cause interference of all the electrical equipment and no internet access?
6. Your body indicates when things are not right by giving the feeling of uneasiness in your stomach. When have you felt this way? Write a paragraph about it and what you did to make the feeling go away.
7. What is meant by 'a cat can look at a king'?
8. What did Ms Slaviero mean about 'balance to the forces' and the light side and dark side?
9. Why was Amelia trying to 'will herself invisible'? Have you ever wanted to be invisible? Why?
10. Describe how the jewels affected Amelia.
11. Amelia lost trust with her parents. How did it make her feel? How would you feel? What would you do?



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12. What are licorice laces?
13. Why did Amelia think that James was ridiculous?
14. What is Occam's Razor?
15. Amelia was enticed into the cottage by momentum. Explain how momentum feels to you, and in what situation you've felt this way.
16. Why has the author used the word 'stalk' to describe what Miss Ardman was doing to Tom?
17. What happened when Miss Ardman uncloaked?
18. James reacted to the situation in an unexpected way. Discuss.
19. What is the description of a wormhole?
20. Holo-emitters are used to cloak aliens. Describe how they work. Draw and label a diagram of one.
21. What do you think a Krskn is?
22. If Charlie plays with the holo-emitter in the middle of the hedge maze, what do you think will happen?

Classroom Activities

Create Intergalactic passports for Dad (Scott), Mum, Amelia, James and Charlie. You will need to draw a portrait photo, record appearance and characteristics for each one.

- Create an advertising campaign for people to come to the hotel. Record using technology. Place on class blog (if possible).
- Act out the scene when the children are caught in Miss Ardman's room. Change the ending. Perform it in front of the class. How would this change the rest of the book?
- Dad made pumpkin and tea-leaf cookies. Do you think they would taste good? Using computer technology, publish a menu that would be available for guests at the hotel.
- Miss Ardman changed. Draw her as 'a reptile monster in a dress'.
- Research the theory of the acceleration of the universe and Brian Schmidt, Australia's Nobel Laureate. Present in an interesting way.
- Debate with another class: 'You can't judge a book by its cover' and/or 'Wouldn't all mothers fight to protect their children?' Video conference equipment (international gateway!) could be used, allowing for cultural collaborations and communication.