



# IN THE DARK SPACES

## TEACHERS NOTES

Written by Cally Black

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont in August 2017

### SYNOPSIS

*'I worry for you, kid,' he says softly. 'I have a grandkid your age. You should be living in a family.'*

*'I can't,' I snap, cos I'd take that option any day for me and Gub, but there's no way I'm ever gonna be in the kind of family the captain's talking about.*

Tamara knows the importance of being silent. If her Aunt Lazella is found to be hiding a teenager and a baby in her cabin on board the *Starweaver Layla*, all three of them will be kicked off the ship, and then their hopes of a better life will be dashed. So Tamara stays quiet, teaching her baby cousin, Tamiki – 'Gub' – how to live in the quiet too. But every day when Gub naps, Tamara sneaks out through the vents to explore, and to steal the protein shakes she so desperately needs to grow large enough to be eligible for work.

A squad of 'Crowpeople' attack during one of these trips. Tamara has just escaped a security guard in the storeroom and is back in the vents when she sees the strange, birdlike, alien creatures storm the ship. They are brutal, merciless, swiftly killing the crew and making their way through the remaining cabins, leaving a trail of bodies in their wake. Tamara races through the vents to get back to Gub, making it just in time to grab him and hide them both in one of the small dark spaces in the walls that she is so familiar with.

Carrying a wide-eyed, silent Gub, Tamara makes her way back through the vents to the kitchen, where Lazella works. Lazella is there, still, silent, lying on the floor. Tamara puts Gub in the kitchen storage room, safely hidden among piles of food, and goes back to her aunt. But Lazella is dead. As Tamara sits beside her aunt's body, trying to process her grief and her terror, the Crowpeople return. Tamara runs; her only thoughts are to lead them as far away from Gub as possible, and to somehow get back to him. But although she leads the Crowpeople away from the kitchen, she isn't fast enough to outrun her pursuers and is caught.

Terrified, and knowing how easily she could be killed, Tamara echoes the way the Crowpeople whistle, 'Tootoopne!', guessing it is the name of their leader and hoping it will be enough to save her. It does. She is taken to Tootoopne, who doesn't kill her, but drags Tamara with them as they wipe out the remaining crew and vacate the ship. Trapped in one of the round black ships of the Crowpeople, Tamara can only watch as she flies away from the *Layla*, leaving Gub behind.



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The second part of the book takes place primarily in the hive, the living, intuitive home ship of the Crowpeople. Tamara is frightened, alone and angry and desperate to get back to Gub, knowing that each minute takes her further from him. She is kept alive by the Crows, many of whom seem to hate her, and the only thing she can think of is to understand them well enough to come up with an escape plan. Tamara starts to learn their language, repeating and deciphering the whistling noises around her until she becomes almost fluent. She learns that the Crowpeople are all female, that the hive provides for them, that they have a deep sense of family and community, and that the reason they attack the ships is because the human fleets are invading their territory and mining all of the phosphorous they need to survive.

As she learns their language and ways, Tamara starts connecting to the Crowpeople, and calls them by their real name – the Garuwa. She befriends Tweetoo, who becomes almost like a sister, and impresses Tootoopne to the extent that she makes Tamara a part of the squad. Tamara is sickened when she finds out that her role in the squad is to translate during raids, calling the crew out from safety to negotiate, only to see them killed, over and over again. She tries to reason with Tootoopne, arguing that not all humans on the ships need to die, that there must be another way. Tootoopne resists the idea, forcing Tamara through the ritual of translating and watching humans die because of her. Until one raid changes everything: Tootoopne takes a hostage, and brings him back to the hive.

Captain Anthony James is an old man who lacks the angry arrogance of many of the other captains. Anthony works to send money home for his daughter, who is alone with two children. His age, and his understanding, make him more sympathetic than most. Tootoopne keeps him chained in her washroom, questioning him about the relationship between humans and money, and instructing Tamara to teach him how to speak Garuwa. As she teaches him, he tells her stories of his family, and the code he shares with his grandson. He reminds Tamara that she deserves to be part of a family, to be loved, and reignites the urgency in her desire to be reunited with Gub. Captain James makes Tamara believe that there is hope for her to find her way back, and to be redeemed. Until the morning of a raid, when she goes to visit him in the washroom and he is gone, his severed hand easily identifiable in Tootoopne's trophy cabinet.

Tamara's grief at finding Captain James' hand fuels her, and she goes on another raid with the squad believing them, after all, to be the cold killers she had first seen them as. The ship they raid, the *Starweaver Jolene*, is better prepared than the last and fights back. In the chaos, Tamara escapes



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into the vents, her need to find Gub overwhelming any guilt she has at leaving her squad behind. She hides, ignoring Tweetoo's calls, ignoring the sounds of the battle, until she hears the Garuwa flyers leave. And in the silence of the ship Tamara drops to the ground, hoping she is one step closer to finding Gub again.

Tamara is found by the crew of the *Jolene* and questioned, telling them she is an escaped prisoner. She begs for any news of Gub, feeling a seed of hope when a crew member says she knows of a toddler rescued from a raided ship. When Tamara reveals that she was forced to translate for the Garuwa, she is taken to the cells, where she discovers that Tweetoo, who stayed behind to rescue Tamara, has been captured and is a prisoner, her wings bent and broken. Tamara is devastated to see Tweetoo so damaged, and torn between her loyalty to her 'sister' and her loyalty to the humans who might reunite her with Gub. But when Tweetoo asks Tamara to put her out of her misery, rather than heal her and keep her prisoner as the humans have requested, Tamara is unable to refuse.

Tweetoo's death makes everyone suspicious of her loyalties, particularly Rochford, who is one of the guards. She tries to explain that Tweetoo was her friend, but this only makes them question her further, and the captain reveals that he has seen footage of her calling out other captains to die during the Garuwa raids. Tamara feels numb, guilty and horrified at what she has done and the thought that she might never see Gub again. In the hive, her ability to speak saved her, but back with humans, Tamara's silence returns, and she feels ill-equipped to explain why she did what she did to survive, particularly because she is aware that at some point, the Garuwa became friends, almost family to her.

The captain reveals that Gub has been found and, with a false sense of calm, assures Tamara he will reunite them if she helps his crew translate Garuwa communications that they have intercepted. Ships have been disappearing from the sky, and they are certain that the Garuwa have something to do with it. Tamara is paired with Seoul Song, the master of prospects for Starweaver Shipping, in charge of studying and translating 'Vulture-speak'. Although Tamara is marked a 'Vulture lover' by many of the crew, and met with jeers and disdain, knowing that Gub has boarded a ship and is on his way to meet her keeps her going. And then Gub's ship disappears from the sky.

In the final part of the book Tamara, shattered at the thought that after coming so close, she may have lost her chance to see Gub again, desperately recalls the Garuwa's transmissions. She thinks she can hear a tapping of the code that Captain James had once shared with her. And when she listens closely she is



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sure that Gub is alive, and safe with the Garuwa. But the captain of the *Jolene* doesn't believe her, and orders an attack on the Garuwa, which will wipe out the hive – and any chance Tamara has of finding Gub alive.

With no idea how or why Captain James might have survived to transmit the code, Tamara takes a leap of faith, stealing a flyer from the *Jolene* and hoping that she makes it in time to warn the hive. She and Song fly to the hive, with Tamara calling to Tootoopne that she is sorry, she is too late, and has accidentally led the *Jolene's* attack straight to the Garuwa. But Tootoopne has been keeping secrets. Together with Captain James, who is very much alive, she has created a new hive, designed to act as a hub and waystation for shipping companies to trade and buy the minerals they need from the Garuwa.

To Tamara's delight, she discovers Gub is indeed on board the new hive, and that Tootoopne has granted permission for them to live there with Captain James and his family. While Song, Captain James and Tootoopne negotiate a deal that will allow humans and Garuwa to trade peacefully together, Tamara finally reunites with Gub. The book ends with a sense of hope: hope for harmonious coexistence between the humans and the Garuwa, and hope for Tamara and Gub's future in a safe place they can finally call home.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cally Black's** universe is filled with stories – from her childhood on hill country sheep stations, to youthful backpacking adventures, to more recent motorbike rides across the USA – but it's stories set in future worlds that fascinate her most. And while she loves science and technology and the way they shape our future, what really grabs her attention is the people, especially those left on the fringes of society.

Cally works in education and lives in Melbourne with her family and a slightly nutty dog. She won the Ampersand Prize for her debut novel, *In the Dark Spaces*.



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### GENERAL COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

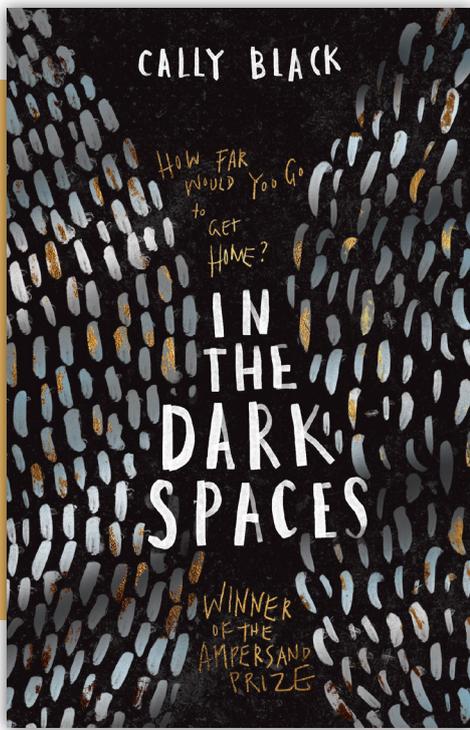
The following are some basic comprehension questions to consider before, during and after reading the book. More detailed questions and activities follow, grouped under theme and character.

#### Before Reading the Book

- Consider the title of the book (*In the Dark Spaces*), and the setting. What do you think the dark spaces might be? How might the author use this phrase to capture a number of ideas in the novel?
- Do you think this book fits into a particular genre? What makes you think this?
- Based on the genre, and other elements of the book itself (such as the cover, the author's biography and the blurb), what do you expect from the book? Do you think it will have a particular type of ending? A specific setting? Certain character types?
- Write down your expectations so that you can revisit them when you've finished the book, and compare what you know about the story once you've read it, to what you predicted at the beginning.

#### While Reading the Book

- What will happen to Gub and Tamara if they are discovered in Lazella's cabin?
- What dream does Lazella have for her family?
- How are the Crowpeople first introduced?
- What drives Tamara's choices in the book?
- What does Tamara do to stay alive?
- How are the Crowpeople described physically? How does this influence the way you think about them?
- What tells you that the hive is unlike other spaceships? How is it different?
- Who decides that Tamara is to be kept alive?
- How does Tamara win over the Garuwa?
- What changes to make Tamara feel more at home with the Garuwa?
- What does Tamara think her role is when she joins the Garuwa squad? What do they actually want her to do? How does this make her feel?
- What name do the Garuwa give Tamara? Why do you think they rename her?
- Why does Tootoopne apologise to Tamara (Weku)?
- What does Tootoopne think humans are slave to? Is she correct?
- Why does Tootoopne keep Captain Anthony James alive? What does she want to learn from him?



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- What stories does Captain James share with Tamara about his family?
- How many people know the code he shares with her?
- Is Tamara being disloyal to Gub by befriending the Garuwa?
- What does Captain James teach Tamara about family?
- What is the significance of the '8'?
- How does Tamara escape the Garuwa? How does she feel about them when she does?
- Why is Tweetoo captured?
- What do the humans on board the *Jolene* think about Tamara? Who is right?
- What does Tweetoo say to Tamara to convince Tamara to kill her?
- What does Tamara hear in the transmissions from the Garuwa? What does it mean?
- What does Tamara mean when she says that she is 'free' (p236) to love Gub again?
- Why is Gub called 'Whisper'?
- How does Tamara betray Seoul Song? Why does Song decide to help her?
- What solution does Tootoopne come up with to forge peace with the humans? Who has helped her?

### After Reading the Book

- What are the three key themes that you felt the book explored?
- Did the book surprise you? How?
- Was there anything in the book you didn't like? Why? How did this impact your reading?
- Are you glad Tamara was given a happy ending? Share your thoughts on this with your classmates, and discuss your feelings and why/when they were different.



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### EXPLORATION OF THE TEXT BY THEME

#### Overall Themes

- Language\*
- Loss
- Survival
- Loyalty
- Space travel
- Belonging
- Family\*
- Ownership

\*The themes of language and family are explored in greater detail below.

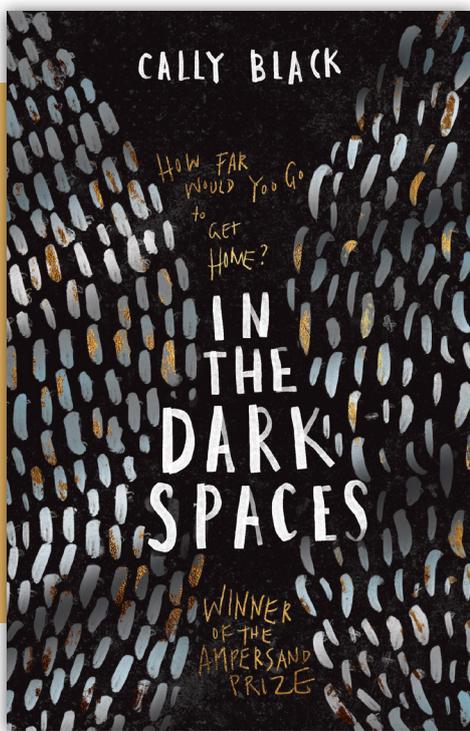
#### Language

*The different weapons argue back and forth like they're thinking for themselves cos the screams and whistles and shouts around them don't make sense. Well, they don't make sense in words. They make sense in all the tones they carry. Fear, hate, anger. It's in the voices, and it's in the whistles. It goes on around me. But it's not my problem. Not no more.*

(p192–193)

Language plays a vital role in *In the Dark Spaces*. It restricts or encourages understanding between cultures and individuals. It defines characters, and positions them in particular ways in relation to others in the novel. And, at times, it offers freedom. In the novel, author Cally Black has created a completely new language, made up of whistling sounds and unfamiliar words – one of Tamara's major journeys within the narrative is her path to learning the language of the Garuwa, and in doing so, discovering who they are.

The following set of questions and activities are designed to encourage readers to consider the assumptions we make about people based on the words they use, and the words we use to describe them, and the ways in which language has the ability to hinder or free us.



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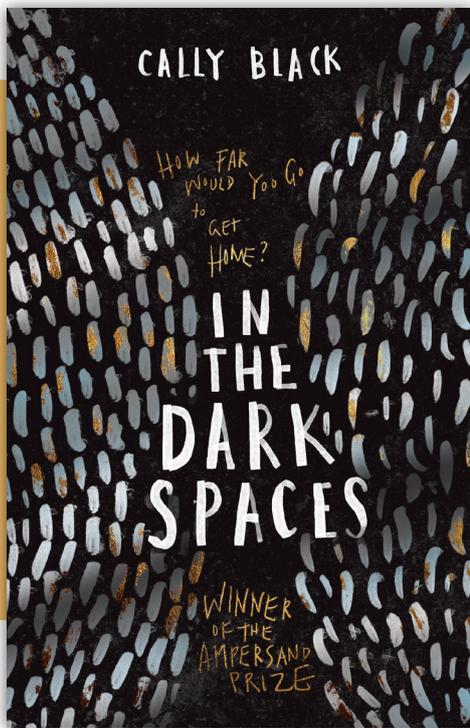
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In groups or as a class, go through the following:

- 1. Make a list of moments in the book where miscommunication leads to a negative outcome.**
  - How has language (or lack of language) led to this situation?
  - What could be done to prevent it happening again?
  - Who should be required to understand in order to prevent a negative outcome?
- 2. Undertake a character study.**
  - Choose a character from the story (one who appears a reasonable number of times).
  - What is their name? Do they have more than one name?
  - How are they described? Do any of the descriptions contradict each other? How does this impact your understanding of the character?
  - How does the character use language to express themselves in different ways (find examples where they use language to be in control, or to show love, or to explain).
  - How does the character communicate? Do they use words alone? How do we understand verbal language based on other elements such as surrounds, body language and actions?
- 3. Think about the difficulties the author must have encountered when she set out to create a new language.**
  - How does she achieve consistency within the language (how can we tell that all the Garuwa are speaking the same language)?
  - Are there any similarities between the words she chooses to describe things and objects and their English translation? How would this make Garuwa difficult/more easy to learn?
  - Where would you start if you were going to create a language from scratch? What other books can you think of where this is used?
  - What does including a new language in the text do to your reading of it? How does learning a new language empower Tamara?
- 4. Consider the impact language has on our understanding of and attitude towards other individuals.**
  - Find someone to interview who speaks English as a second language. (This activity can be recorded and collated into a podcast or vlog.)
  - Have a fifteen-minute (minimum) conversation with them about their experience navigating a new



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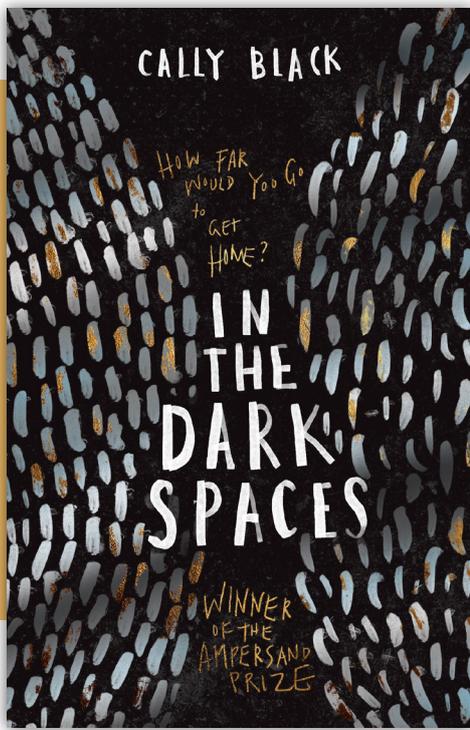
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place while learning a new language. Listen, and be respectful of what your subject is sharing with you.

- Think about a time when you haven't fit in. Write your memory as a scene with dialogue and then write a short paragraph considering how this scene would have been easier/more difficult or had a different outcome, if you and the other person/people were communicating in different ways.
- 5. Think of a time when you've had to make a difficult decision about someone in your family. It might be a time you've had to tell them something difficult, or a fight, or compromising between two wants.**
- Write a letter to the person you've chosen, telling them why the decision was difficult, and explaining why you made the choice you did.
- 6. One of the things Cally Black explores in the novel is the role of women, and women in families.**
- What are the traditional roles of women in families? Consider both practical roles, eg. day-to-day chores etc, and also other roles, eg. being a carer or provider.
  - Have the roles of women in families changed?
  - Does the squad seem more or less like a family when we discover that they are all female?
  - Choose a woman from your family and write a short biography about them. This could be presented online, as a poster, or as a creative response. Consider their role within your family, and beyond it, thinking about both the way you perceive them and the way they are perceived by the rest of the world.
  - What does being a woman and being part of a family mean to Tamara, particularly towards the end of the book?



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### EXPLORATION OF THE TEXT BY CHARACTER

#### Tamara

*'Who the hell are you?' he says again, nervy as.  
Who the hell am I?*

*I'm Weku, the one who screams life into the darkness. I'm family to my little Tamiki, the only one he has.  
I look up at him and drop my hands.*

*'I'm Tamara,' I say, loud as any Sixer, loud enough to call my name alive from the darkness.  
(p196)*

*Tweetoo lifts her head, which pulls her arms up, jerks her wings. 'Weku, you are my sister. You are my squad, yes?'*

*'Yes, Tweetoo,' I say and bob my head. Never mind I ditched them just a few hours ago, I don't know how to give up on Tweetoo. I am a woman too. I protect. I will protect her to the end.  
(p212)*

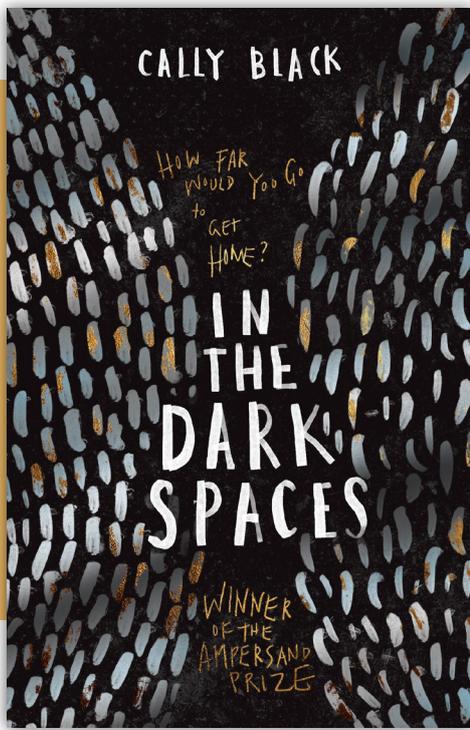
Tamara is a complicated character, driven by a number of wants and desires, although above all, her focus remains on saving Gub.

1. What does Tamara want in the first few chapters of the book?
2. How does what she wants change after the invasion of the Crowpeople?
3. Is it satisfying when Tamara and Gub are reunited? Talk in class about the connection between plot and the wants and needs of the characters – what would have happened to the story if Tamara and Gub had been reunited earlier?

Consider Tamara's various journeys throughout the course of the novel. There is her physical journey through space, her coming-of-age journey as she starts to see herself as a woman with agency and power, her linguistic journey of learning to speak a new language, and her emotional journey of dealing with her grief and loss, and coming to terms with her new position in the world.

Choose one of these journeys and chart it over the course of the book. Find examples in the text that illustrate the following points:

1. Who Tamara is when she starts the journey.



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2. What initiates it/who is involved?
3. What blocks Tamara from moving forward in her journey?
4. What does Tamara have to do/learn or how does she have to change to move forward?
5. Who does she have to rely on?
6. Is there a goal? What is she trying to achieve? Can she see the end point?
7. What will happen if Tamara reaches her goal?
8. Does Tamara lose anything over the course of her journey?
9. How is she different at the end? Has she succeeded?

### The Garuwa

*Tootoopne talks about how more and more human ships come into their space, and how they worry for their hives if more come. He talks about how humans fire on anything in their path. How humans take the minerals the hives need to grow. He talks about how much good we do protecting all the hives of their children.*

*I never thought space could belong to anyone. Space is just there. Land, planets, minerals, that's what humans want, but space is empty. It's what you travel through to get someplace else, unless your people live in hives that float in space, I suppose.*

(p109)

From the beginning, the Garuwa are set up to be alien or other to the humans in the book. They are physically different, they lack the language to communicate with humans, and they are immediately positioned as the attacker.

1. How does the Garuwa's physical appearance in the opening sequence set the tone for how we view them in the rest of the book?
2. What does their lack of language or communication with humans do to this opening exchange?
3. Why do you think they save Tamara?

When the Garuwa return to the hive, we (and Tamara) see a completely different side of them.

1. How are the Garuwa different inside the hive?
2. What do the Garuwa want? Is this incompatible with what the humans want?



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3. How are the Garuwa different to the humans? How are they the same?
4. What do the Garuwa rely on in order to survive?
5. What does the revelation that all Garuwa are female do to our understanding of them as characters?

Choose one of the Garuwa and keep a character journal about them as you read the book. Note down:

1. Any interesting quotes that reference how they look, how they behave, what they want.
2. Any connections they have to other characters in the book (present or not).
3. Whether they change at any point in the book (it may be a change of attitude, a change of motivation or a success or failure).
4. How they interact with Tamara. Consider what this suggests about how they might interact with other humans.
5. How they interact with other Garuwa.
6. How they speak (if they do).
7. What their role is in the hive, and more broadly, in the story.

### PROMPTS FOR CREATIVE RESPONSES

1. Use the five-part story structure of the novel to write (or plot) your own work of fiction. Think about how this structure restricts the piece, but also what it offers in terms of inspiration.
2. There are many ways to tell a story. Cally Black has chosen to tell hers using straightforward prose, but you can tell a story through song, as a play, a comic, a poem, or a film. Choose a scene from the book and rewrite it using one of the above forms. Write a short paragraph talking about the decisions you've made in adapting the text, and what you feel is lost or gained in the adaptation.
3. Think about some of the formal elements of the science fiction genre, particularly those that Cally Black uses in the novel. Make a list of these elements and use them as a starting point to write your own science fiction piece.
4. Think about the heavy influence of language and communication in the text. Write a scene that is completely dialogue, where one character is speaking English and the other is speaking a made-up language (you need to try to make the reader be able to make sense of this narrative, so think hard about how your characters interact, and use language to communicate in this way).
5. Write an alternate ending for the book. Compare your ending to the original and comment on the strengths and weaknesses of each.