

## The Special Ones Teachers Notes

Written by Em Bailey

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont, April 2016

### SUMMARY

*“What would happen if I wrote the truth? I’m pretending to be the reincarnation of someone in a photograph because some crazy guy thinks I’m an immortal being. But it’s only a matter of time before I slip up, and when that happens he’ll probably kill me. But instead I supply a line of Esther’s, one almost threadbare from overuse. You must have faith.”*

Esther is one of the Special Ones – four people trapped by a nameless man in a remote farmhouse. *He* believes that the four – Esther, Felicity, Lucille and Harry – are the reincarnations of his true family, one that lived a hundred years ago.

According to *him* they are safe at the farm – safe from toxic modern life, safe from a meaningless existence, safe in their endless work. *He* watches them every moment of every day, ready to punish them if they forget who they are.

In order to survive, Esther must forget who she was before. She must play the role set out in her remembering book. She must observe a strict set of rules that govern everything from where she can go on the farm to how much physical contact she can have, with whom, and when. Non-observance of the rules leads to severe punishment. Esther knows *he* will renew her if she stops being Special, and that renewal almost certainly means death.

All the while, *he* is broadcasting their lives to eager followers on the outside. Every night, there is evening chat, where The Special Ones act as oracles, giving advice to people on the outside world via computers. These followers donate, chat and buy merchandise via The Special Ones portal.

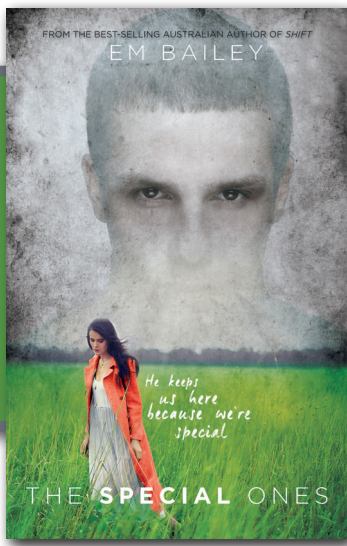
When Harry, her friend and unspoken love, is renewed, it sets off a chain of events for Esther. She is no longer willing or able to keep up the facade. She *will* take risks to be with Harry and she *will* take risks to save the other girls.

In a superbly crafted novel, Em Bailey switches pace in the second half of her novel to explore Esther – Tess – in the outside world. She will do battle not only with her captor, but with the restrictions imposed by her family, the media and her inner demons.

Esther is a complicated hero, seduced by an astute and psychologically manipulative man, *he*, who preys on her teenage insecurities. In her initial delusion she recruits for the sect and then continues out of fear for her life. Esther knows she’s doing this at the expense of other people’s autonomy and lives but she’s trapped. Ultimately, she takes back her freedom and the freedom of the others, exposing *him* for the psychopathic manipulator he always was.

The novel is gripping but not macabre. It’s an intelligent interrogation of traditional and social media. It allows for class discussion on important topics such as personal responsibility, mental illness, redemption, drugs, gender and identity, free will and self-determination.

The novel will keep students in suspense until the final page, which provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss how an effective suspenseful narrative is constructed.



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### About the Author

Em Bailey was born in Melbourne, Australia and used to work as a new-media designer for a children's television production house. Now she is a full-time author.

*The Special Ones* is her second novel for teenagers. Her first novel, *Shift*, won the teens' choice *Gold Inky Award* in Australia and was shortlisted for a number of other awards, including *CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers* and the *Aurealis YA Fiction Award*.

When she is not writing, Em is generally getting lost, losing things, reading, hanging out with her friends and family, and listening to podcasts. Although her books veer to the creepy, Em is a wimp when it comes to scary stuff and always locks her doors at night.

### Reading Journal

*The Special Ones* is full of unexpected plot developments, controversial media issues and moral dilemmas. The situations that the characters find themselves in are strange and frightening; however, the novel also explores identity and family issues that are incredibly relevant to teenagers.

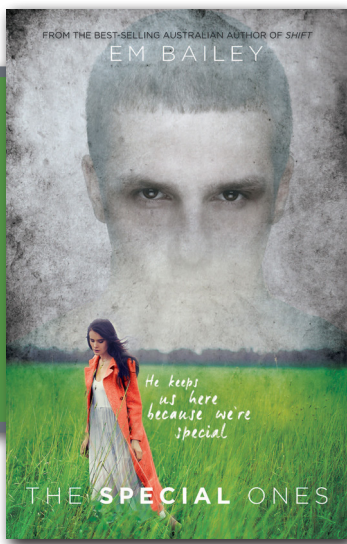
As you read *The Special Ones*, keep a journal. Make notes on some or all of the things listed below.

- Fears that the book raises in you.
- Your opinions on the issues explored.
- Questions you would like to discuss.
- Similarities and differences between yourself and the characters.
- Predictions about upcoming events.
- Similarities and differences between this book and other stories (books, TV, film) in the same genre.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Based on the cover, title, blurb and genre, make some predictions about what might happen in this book.

Look at the **General Vocabulary List**. Based on the words, make some predictions about the historical setting of this novel.



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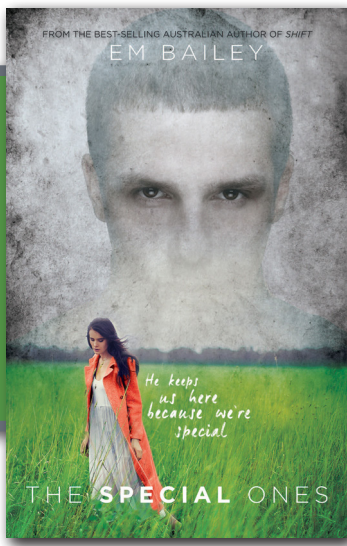
*The Special Ones* explores some challenging issues. Before you read the novel discuss your opinion on the statements/questions below.

- “Sometimes being Esther feels like wearing a Halloween costume. One that doesn’t fit. One I can’t ever take off.” (p.2) We all wear masks. They’re as freeing as they are restrictive.
- What masks do you wear? (Consider how you might act differently around friends, parents, teachers, strangers.)
- “The survival urge forces us to do things we don’t want to do.” (p.83) Are there ever situations when it’s acceptable to break the law? What are they?
- What does reincarnation mean? What religions hold this belief? Do you believe in reincarnation?
- Imagine a world completely without technology – phones, electricity etc. What would be the pros? What would be the cons?
- The teenagers in this novel are vulnerable in many ways – at home, at school, with friends, online. What pressures/challenges do you face? How do you deal with these pressures?

### General Vocabulary List

Listed below are words you will find in *The Special Ones*. In brackets are the pages where they can be found in the text.

- In your journal, write a definition of each word.
- Design a game to test a player’s knowledge of these words and their meanings.



# The Special Ones

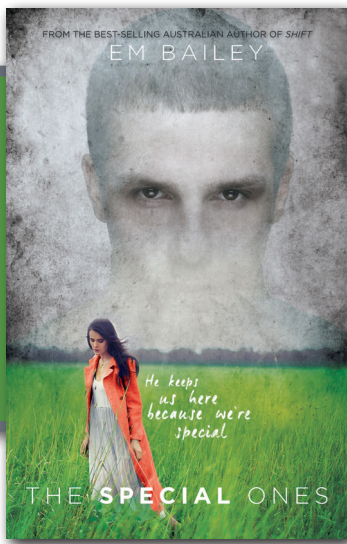
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### General Vocabulary List:

- |                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Corset (1)          | Devouring (133)       |
| Parlour (2)         | Coax (144)            |
| Lope (2)            | Grotesque (190)       |
| Darning (2)         | Cult (192)            |
| Nubbles (3)         | Reckoning (193)       |
| Innumerable (3)     | Jovial (201)          |
| Carafe (3)          | Billow (206)          |
| Generator (4)       | Husks (207)           |
| Gilt-framed (5)     | Reciprocated (214)    |
| Transformations (7) | Gullible (220)        |
| Salivates (8)       | Solace (229)          |
| Peripheral (9)      | Foreboding (231)      |
| Carcass (14)        | Slandered (243)       |
| Authentic (14)      | Misdemeanors (259)    |
| Anecdote (16)       | Insubordination (259) |
| Looming (20)        | Euphemistically (259) |
| Ritual (23)         | Dissipated (269)      |
| Vigilant (25)       | Artifact (271)        |
| Transgression (35)  | Blatantly (271)       |
| Lure (40)           | Evasive (275)         |
| Omen (45)           | Vigilance (277)       |
| Transformation (62) | Devotion (280)        |
| Nuance (70)         | Mundane (280)         |
| Demure (75)         | Eradicating (285)     |
| Piously (123)       | Proffered (298)       |
|                     | Ricochet (299)        |



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## READING ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

As you read, record answers to the following questions in your journal. Also, as you learn more about the characters, fill in a character chart for the main characters. An example of a character chart has been provided in the **Character** section of these notes.

#### Chapter One

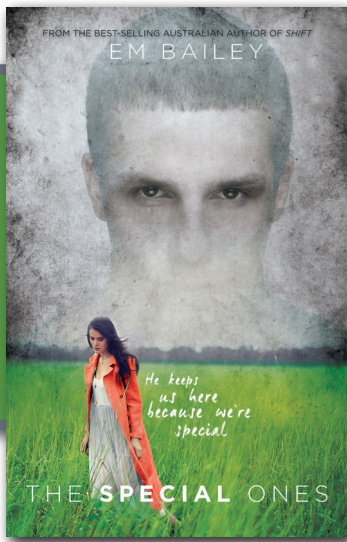
- What is the effect of italicising the pronoun *him*?
- What dangers does Esther think lie beyond the gate?
- What expression must the new Lucille have?
- What do you think the 'renewal process' means?
- What is the purpose of the 'guiding word'? Why do you think *he* gives it? What other forms of control are outlined in Chapter One?
- What is the relationship between Esther and Harry?
- As a class, discuss any questions you have after reading this chapter. What things do you know? What do you want to know?

#### Chapter Two

- Who might the headless chicken symbolise?
- What do you learn about the lifestyle of the characters in this chapter?
- What does the beetle show about Esther and her situation?
- How long has Esther been at the farm?
- In this chapter the characters are acting differently to the way they feel. What are their real feelings? How does the author convey the difference between the script and their genuine feelings? You might look for examples of inner dialogue, dialogue and mannerisms.

#### Chapter Three

- What do we learn about Esther's old life? How has being at the farm changed her? Add to your character chart.
- What are 'victim vibes'? What image does the word 'victim' evoke? Can you think of a neutral word to describe people who are kidnapped?



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- Why are there no clocks?
- What does the chat room reveal to the reader about *him*?
- What is a ritual? Why might there be so many of them at the farm?
- What do you think of the followers?
- What are the virtues of The Special Ones?
- As a class, discuss the important revelation that occurs at the end of the chapter.

### Chapter Four

- If you were Esther, and you had one thing in the mattress to remind you of 'before' in *your* life, what would it be?
- Why doesn't Esther try to escape? Would you in her situation?
- What do we learn about Harry in this chapter? Add to your character chart.
- In your opinion, why doesn't Harry try to escape?
- What might 'renewal' be?

### Chapter Five

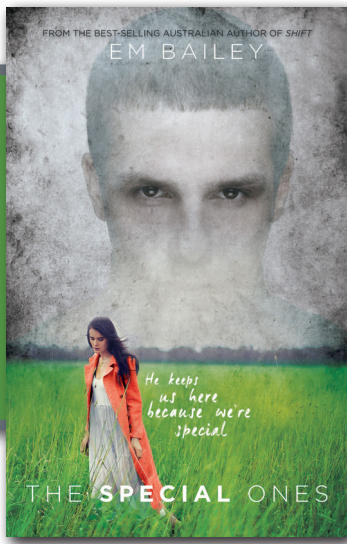
- "We did what we had to do" Harry comments on page 52. What's your opinion of Harry and Esther after reading this chapter? Are they 'evil' as Esther worries?
- What would be the effect of never being able to touch someone? Why might *he* have made this part of Esther's rules?
- What techniques are they using to brainwash Sasha?
- What are some examples of spiritual or religious language in the text?

### Chapter Six

- "That's so typical for a Lucille" Esther comments on page 62. Can people be categorised as simply as this? Why or why not?
- Discuss with a partner how you might react if you were in Sasha's situation.
- Discuss why mirrors are incredibly important to our sense of self. Are they damaging to our sense of self in any way? Is physical appearance trivial?

### Chapter Seven

- As a class, discuss this chapter. Discuss the methods of control. Discuss why Sasha obediently goes into the cellar.



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- Do Harry and Esther have a choice?

### Chapter Eight

- Describe the view from Lucille's room. What does this tell the reader about the farm's location?
- "We're kind of like gods aren't we?" p. 91. Why do the followers need them so much?
- Do you believe that Sasha has really transformed?
- What do you think happens if a person fails the 'verification'?

### Chapter Nine

- What dangers are there for the characters, other than *him*?
- Would *he* save them from these dangers? Discuss what you see as *his* motives.
- In pairs, discuss Felicity's 'sharing'. Why does she want the punishment? What emotions does the scene evoke? If Felicity is there to be a reminder that a childlike joy is required in the world, what might be the point of this scene?
- Discuss some of the signs and warnings that occur in this chapter.
- How does the storm change Esther?
- What happens to Harry as a result of the storm?

### Chapter Ten

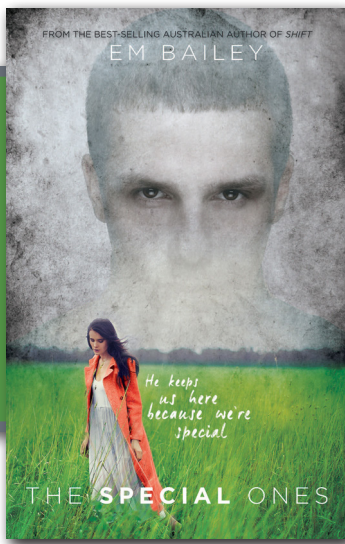
- What realisation does Esther come to in this chapter?
- How and why does she change?
- Harry doesn't even know Esther's real name. Can they really know each other, considering the situation they're in?
- Why does Esther feel stronger after gazing at the stars with Harry?
- How is the sunset used for significance on page 126?
- Predict what might happen next as a result of the events in this chapter.

### Chapter Eleven

- The narrative changes direction in this chapter. How?

### Chapter Twelve

- How is the dynamic between Esther and Lucille shifting?



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### Chapter Thirteen

- Why are so many rules and rituals? Discuss the ways in which rules and rituals can be important in our everyday lives (Rituals of grief, for example.) Discuss how they're being used to control and dominate the characters in this novel.
- Why do you think *he* is stealing from Esther? Make some predications.
- "There's always been an unspoken agreement between us: we do what we can to protect each other." (p. 138) Discuss Esther's thought. Is it fair? Has she always protected this Lucille? Where does your sympathy lie?

### Chapter Fourteen

- What do we learn of the characters in this chapter? Add to your character charts.
- How has Esther changed even further?
- Was Felicity's accident foreshadowed in earlier chapters?
- How might Felicity's wounds be symbolic?

### Chapter Fifteen

- Define 'institutionalisation'. Discuss how this term applies to Esther in this chapter.
- Discuss Lucille's tears. Why does she cry when she is partly to blame for Esther's 'renewal'?

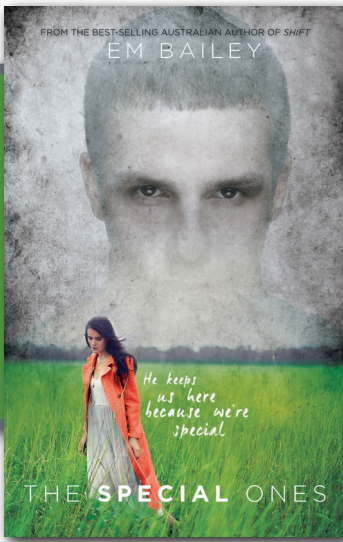
### Chapter Sixteen

- What surprises you about the start of this chapter?
- What are the visual signs of Esther's change?
- How does *he* feel about Esther?
- What does the puppy anecdote show about *him*?
- Who is the vision?
- Is *he* what you expected? Why or why not?

### Chapter Seventeen

- What does the reader learn about *him* and his family in this chapter?
- What does the reader learn about why *he* might be so damaged?





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### Chapter Eighteen

- Make a prediction about why Esther is scared to have Harry come into the police station.
- How is this Harry different? Add to your Harry character chart.

### Chapter Nineteen

- What suspicions do you have about Harry after reading this chapter?
- Make a prediction – what do you think was the 'tragedy'?
- In pairs, discuss the revelations that occur in this chapter. How did *The Special Ones* originate? What's your opinion of *him*? If *he* is Harry, then who is Esther's Harry?

### Chapter Twenty

- How does the world respond to Esther? Is this how you see Esther? Is this how you think Esther sees herself?
- How does *he* feel about the environment?
- Make a predication – what are the 'possessions'?

### Chapter Twenty-One

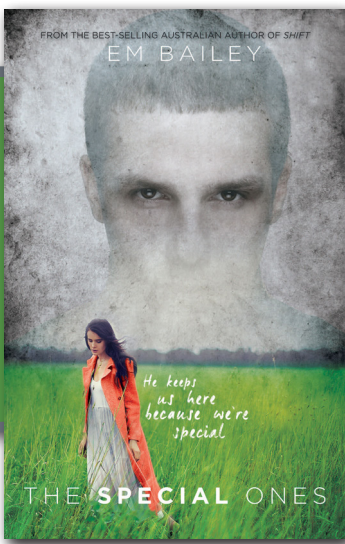
- Describe Tess in one word.

### Chapter Twenty-Two

- How does *he* camouflage himself?
- 'They're barely even human', *he* comments. If you were in the position of these girls, how would you maintain and protect your humanity?
- What are the girls doing for *him*?
- What has been the impact of the darkness on these girls?

### Chapter Twenty-Three

- Add to Tess's character chart. What do we learn about her family in this chapter?
- How do you explain people dressing up as Esther?



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### Chapter Twenty-Four

- Do you agree with Mr and Mrs Kershaw's way of helping Tess? In what ways do they not understand her experience?
- In what ways has being Esther helped Tess?

### Chapter Twenty-Five

- How does the author create suspense in the novel?
- Were you correct in your predications about the 'tragedy'?
- Why and how does the public perception of Tess change? How has your perception of her changed?

### Chapter Twenty-Six

- Why was Tess taken in by the cult? What made her vulnerable?

### Chapter Twenty-Seven

- What more do we learn about how the farm has changed Tess?

### Chapter Twenty-Eight

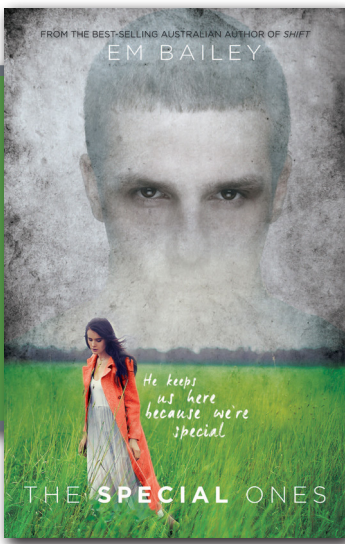
- Make a prediction – what do you think might happen to Mrs Lewis if she keeps invading *his* privacy?
- What is Stockholm syndrome? (248) Why do you think this syndrome occurs?
- What does the reader discover about Harry in this chapter? Add to your character chart.
- To what extent do you blame Harry for his actions? Justify your answer.

### Chapter Twenty-Nine

- Tess finds a letter in the bin calling her a witch, asking if she knows what happens to witches. To what is the letter writer referring?
- Do you agree that Tess and Harry should not be blamed at all for the things they did?

### Chapter Thirty

- How does the outside world see Tess now? Provide a quote to support your answer.
- How is the media portrayed in this chapter? Provide a quote to support your answer.



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### Chapter Thirty-One

- How do the police find the missing girls?
- How is this ending for the girls different from some other books/films in this genre?

### Chapter Thirty-Two

- What does Tess receive in this chapter?
- What does *he* decide must be done?

### Chapter Thirty-Three

- Do you think Harry should turn himself into the police?
- What events surprised you in this chapter?
- In what way has Esther finally come to realise what it was like for the other girls?
- How do you explain *his* belief that he is Harry?

### Epilogue

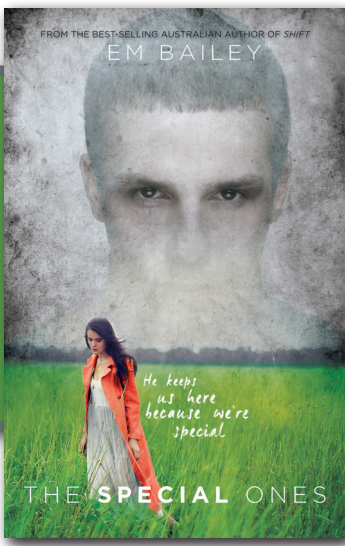
- How is ritual presented as a *good* thing in this chapter?
- Why does Tess feel she knows Harry so well?
- How does each girl deal with the trauma?
- What might the rain symbolise?

## DEVELOPMENT

### Novel Map

Draw a map of the farm, and the other important **settings** that are described in *The Special Ones*.

Mark on your map what you see as the most important **events** of the novel. Discuss with the class why you have chosen to highlight these events. Do they show something about a particular character? Do they show change in a character? Do they reveal a key theme? Are they important to maintain suspense and keep your interest piqued?



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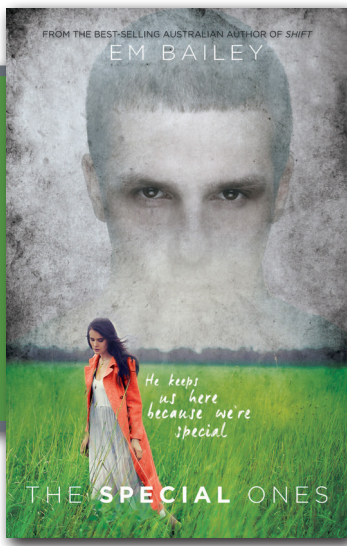
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### Characters

The author has played with the reader's sense of perception in the novel. Our views of the characters change, depending on who is describing them. As you read, make notes on the characters. It may help to use a chart like the one below.

	Harry (at the farm)	Shared Characteristic	Harry Fernard	Comments from media/other characters
Appearance				
Specialties				
Usual routine				
Territory				
Purpose on the farm				
Purpose in the outside world				
Strengths				
Weaknesses				
How Harry has changed though the novel				



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The characters in *The Special Ones* are satisfying because they are complex. They are brave, scared, flawed, and in some cases, redeemed.

### Esther/Tess

- What qualities/characteristics do Esther and Tess share?
- Does being Esther help Tess in any way? Explain your answer and support with quotes from the novel.
- The media seem determined to show Tess as either good or bad. Do either of these labels adequately describe Tess? How would you explain how and why she acted the way she did?
- Esther is an incredibly strong heroine. Discuss.

### Harry/Harry Fernard

- What factors restrict Harry's choices in the novel?
- Harry kidnapped girls and helped to brainwash them in return for money. He did not leave the farm to get help until his two years were up. Only then did he save Esther. He deserves to go to jail. As a class, put Harry on trial. How should a jury judge him? How do you judge him?
- What is the value of having such complex characters in literature? How do flaws in characters enhance a novel?

### Him (Harry)

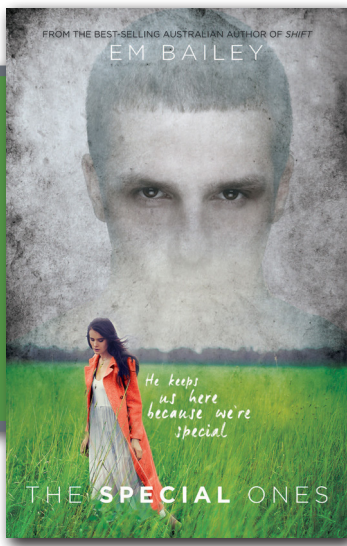
- *He* is a monster deserving of no sympathy. Is this how you see *him*? Is this how you think the author intends us to see *him*? Give evidence from the text to support your view.
- Why is *he* able to manipulate Esther?

## Character Writing Activity

Choose one character from *The Special Ones*. Write a monologue in which the character explains how their attitude has changed because of the events they've experienced. Explain what they regret.

Imagine that you are the Lucille described on page 67. Write a piece where you describe and reflect on your experience at the farm, leading to your decision to attempt escape.

Write Felicity's account of being saved.



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## Themes

Em Bailey explores many powerful themes in her novel. In pairs, choose one theme and find three quotes and two examples from the text to illustrate it. Share your findings with the class. Share also, your thoughts on the questions raised below.

### The impact of Media – Print, Digital, Social

- How is the media presented as both a positive and negative force in the novel?
- Analyse the use of language used by the media in *The Special Ones*.
- How does the media present the farm? How does it shape the public's view of Esther and Harry?
- Does the media create the public's obsession with the macabre? Or does it simply feed it? Explain your answer.

### The Environment

- In what ways is the environment (the natural world) shown to be vulnerable in the novel?
- Who else is vulnerable in the novel? In what ways might the environment be symbolic?
- Does *his* love of the environment create any sympathy in you for *him*? Why or why not?

### Environment

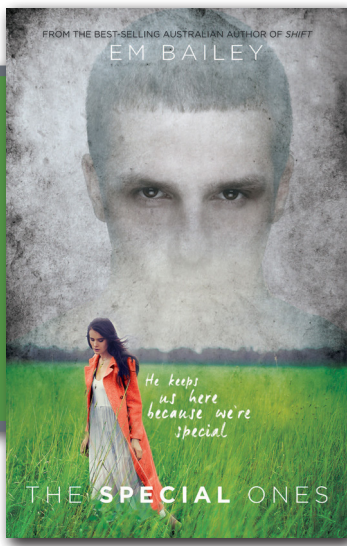
- In what ways does the novel show the importance of a person's personal environment (home life, school life, work life) in the development and change of his or her identity?
- *He* comments about Harry that people like him can't change. To what extent does the novel show that positive change is possible?

### Choice

- Esther/Tess comments that she and Harry did not have a choice – they had to act in the way they did in order to survive. Sasha might argue differently. How does the novel present the idea that personal choice is complicated? What factors have an impact on the choices we make?

### Reality

- Stories tell us more about the teller than reality. What things do his rules show about *his* upbringing?
- Why is Sasha so quick to take on the lies she is told?
- Lies are some times seductive. Discuss in relation to the text and your life.



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### Survival

- Food and shelter are not enough to ensure a person's survival. Discuss in relation to your life, and the text.
- Surviving as a teenager is harder than anyone knows. Discuss in relation to your life and the text.
- Is maintaining your autonomy essential to survival? Do you think it's possible for a person to live a healthy life if they're not true to themselves? Give examples from the text and society.

### Guilt/ Redemption

- Guilt is necessary to grow. Discuss in relation to the novel.
- Harry is redeemed in the novel. Discuss.
- Esther doesn't need to feel guilt. She's not guilty of anything. To what extent do you agree?

### Identity

- *The Special Ones* shows that identity is always changing. Discuss.
- Our need to belong is as important as food and water. Discuss.
- Belonging does not always set us free. Discuss in relation to the text and your own life.
- Our inner identity can be very different to the face we show. Discuss in relation to the novel.

### Conflict

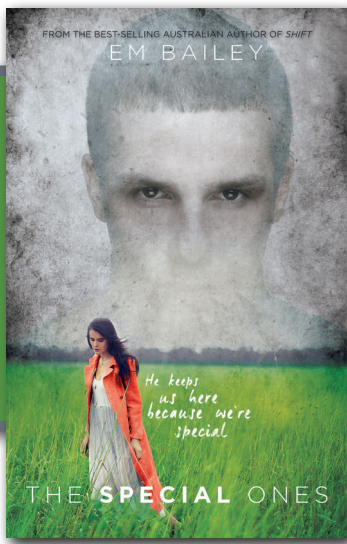
- The novel shows that people's responses to conflict vary. Discuss.
- How a person deals with conflict shows the person that they really are. Discuss.
- The novel shows that conflict can be a positive force in our lives. Discuss.

### Friendship/Love

- How is friendship shown to be a driving force for change and survival in the novel?
- The lack of love is just as defining as its presence. Discuss in relation to the novel.

### Freedom

- Physical barriers are only one way of restricting freedom. Discuss in relation to your personal experience, and the text.
- Esther, despite being trapped, does not surrender all her freedom. Discuss.
- The followers show that humans find freedom incredibly hard. Discuss.



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Not all themes have been listed here. What ones do you think are missing?

(Teachers might consider themes such as mental illness, rituals, gender roles, grief and family, impact of technology.)

## EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

### The danger and attraction of cults

The media in *The Special Ones* describes the group at the farm as a cult.

- Define a cult
- Why are they considered dangerous?
- What techniques do they use to recruit members?
- What makes Tess so vulnerable to this cult?
- The Special Ones have a large following. What might be the attraction for these people?
- Imagine that you're Tess and you've been asked to address a group of Year 8 students. The purpose of your speech is to explain what happened to you, how it happened and how they might protect themselves from having the same experience.

### Euphemisms

Below is list of words and phrases that he invented. Many of them are euphemisms – the substitution of a mild or agreeable word for one that is considered harsh.

- Why do we use euphemisms?
- List three euphemisms commonly used.
- As a class, discuss ways in which euphemisms can be dangerous. For example, euphemisms used by current or past governments, both in Australia and internationally.
- Write a newspaper article where you use euphemisms to weaken the impact of a shocking issue.

### Specific Vocabulary List

Remembering Book (1)

Renewed (4)

The Special Ones (6)

The guiding word (10)

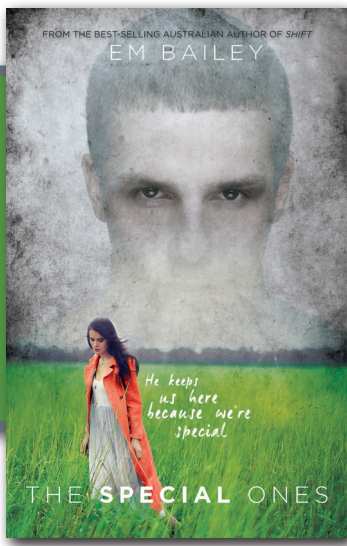
Collection (13)

Followers (14)

Verified (17)

Evening chat (19)





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Tonic (21)  
A sharing (32)  
The changing room (51)  
Reintroduction (59)  
Transitioned (68)  
The Special Ones portal (181)

### Genre

- *The Special Ones* falls into the thriller genre.
- What are some typical characteristics of a thriller novel?
- Within the thriller genre, there are sub genres. List some of these sub genres.
- Does *The Special Ones* fall into any of these sub genres?
- *The Special Ones* has a strong female hero who saves herself and her fellow prisoners. As a class, brainstorm other thrillers that have similarly strong female heroes.
- Why do you think the thriller genre is so popular? What does it offer its readers?
- Is there a danger in casting women in the role of victims? Explain/justify your answer.

Write a short story where you aim to implement the important elements of suspense.

### Personal Writing

Tess comments that sounds and smells trigger memories. Make a list of sounds and smells that trigger memories for you. Choose one memory, and use this to write a personal/descriptive piece of writing.

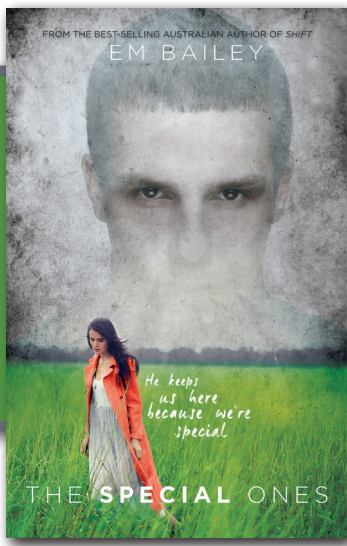
### DRAMA

“When normal forms of communication are restricted, you learn to gather information in other ways.”

Write a one-minute conversation between two people that contains no words. Perform this for the class.

### Comparison Texts

The following fiction titles may provide some opportunities for comparison studies. Suggested thematic comparisons are provided in brackets.



# The Special Ones

## Teachers Notes

Written by Em Bailey

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont, April 2016

### Backgrounding for Teachers

*Natural Way of Things* by Charlotte Wood, Allen and Unwin, 2015, is a great resource. It's speculative fiction, covering many of the same themes as *The Special Ones*, but in an adult text.

\*Note – not suitable for teenagers or class study. Good for teacher background.

*Unseen, Unheard, Unknown: My Life Inside the Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne* by Sarah Hamilton-Byrne, Penguin, 1995. The daughter of a charismatic leader explains the inside workings of this millenarian cult.

\*Note – not suitable for teenagers or class study. Good for teacher background.

### Texts for Students

#### Books

*Shift* by Em Bailey, Hardie Grant Egmont, 2011 (identity, belonging, imitation)

*Stray* by Monica Hesse, Hot Key Books, 2013 (defining your own path, strong female character)

*The Sacred Lies of Minnow Bly* by Stephanie Oakes, Penguin Young Readers, 2015 (cults, faith, trust, rebellion)

*1984* by George Orwell, Penguin Classics, 2011 first published 1949 (surveillance, identity, psychological manipulation, physical control, use of technology)

#### TV/Film

*The Truman Show* (life under surveillance)