

‘Magnificent’  
TIM WINTON

‘A sublime novel’  
HANNAH KENT

# ROBBIE ARNOTT

# Dusk

From the acclaimed author of *Limberlost*

Reading Group Notes



## Blurb

In the distant highlands, a puma named Dusk is killing shepherds. Down in the lowlands, twins Iris and Floyd are out of work, money and friends. When they hear that a bounty has been placed on Dusk, they reluctantly decide to join the hunt. As they journey up into this wild, haunted country, they discover there's far more to the land and people of the highlands than they imagined. And as they close in on their prey, they're forced to reckon with conflicts both ancient and deeply personal.

## Author Biography

Robbie Arnott is the author of *Limberlost*, *The Rain Heron* and *Flames*. He's a two-time winner of *The Age* Book of the Year, and has also been awarded the Voss Literary Prize. He's been named a *Sydney Morning Herald* Best Young Novelist, and has twice been shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, as well as the Dylan Thomas Prize. He lives in Hobart with his wife and daughter.

# Discussion Questions

\* Please note, these questions contain spoilers \*

1. The novel *Dusk* appears to be set in Tasmania, but this is not a Tasmania that is ever named or entirely recognisable. What are some of the subtle signs that identify this landscape, and also that mark it as different from the Tasmania we know? Why do you think Robbie Arnott chose to do this, and what is the effect of these unusual elements of setting on the novel?
2. The novel is pervaded with vivid descriptions of the natural world. How do these descriptions contribute to the overall feel, narrative and themes of the book?
3. How does the author depict the relationship between nature and humans, specifically the different characters in this novel?
4. Consider the significance of the relationship between the twins Iris and Floyd. How does the dynamic between them evolve throughout the novel? How do you think their childhood experiences influenced their bond, and how did Floyd's back injury change things? Discuss.
5. Iris and Floyd use speech sparingly and yet they understand each other intimately. What are some examples of this? What other methods do they use to communicate with each other?
6. We discover that the twins have never known a stable home or a sense of belonging to any one place. However, Iris gradually realises that the highlands are a place she loves and feels at home in. Why do you think this is? Discuss how this idea is explored through Iris's interactions and observations.
7. We are told at the opening of Chapter 2 that the twins are cursed in the simplest way: by the surname they bear – Renshaw. Is this true? In what ways does the twins' surname affect how other characters view them?
8. Iris strikes up an acquaintance with Patrick Lees but is ultimately betrayed by him. As a reader, did you anticipate this? Were there signs you saw that Iris missed? How did your view of Lees change as the novel progressed?
9. On pages 15-16, Lees says, after commenting on the fossilised bones that cradle the tavern: 'Apparently this plateau was once a seafloor. The mountains, underwater. Can't say I believe it, but there are the bones. There's the sky. What do I know, in the scheme of it all? Everything was something else once.' What do you think he means? Discuss.
10. Iris and Floyd show great skill in their ability to survive in a harsh world: to gather and hunt for food, set up camp and make fire, look after their horses. What can you deduce about their lives to this point and the way they were raised? What do these skills reveal about the characters' resilience and adaptability?
11. Reflect on the significance of the memories Iris has of some of her childhood experiences with Floyd. How does the author use memories to enrich the characters' backstories?
12. On page 29, grazier Harriet McLaverty describes how puma came to be in the highlands – brought in to control another introduced species, the deer, at great eventual cost to humans and other animals alike. How does the narrative explore the consequences of introducing non-native species to new environments, and what does it suggest about the balance of ecosystems? What parallels can you draw with other real-life introduced species and humans' reaction to them?
13. McLaverty also describes how her ancestors 'saw off' the first peoples of the land and took it for themselves. We later meet Lydia and her community living on the fringes. Although it isn't spelled out, what signs are we given that these are First Nations people? What can we glean from the way this community makes its living and from Lydia's opinion about *Dusk*?

14. Floyd and Iris discover that if Dusk were removed, local settlers would be able to progress their plans to clear more land, support more crops and livestock, and provide 'a whole life of work' (p31) to people like them. This is a very attractive proposition to Iris and Floyd – but at what cost? Discuss.
15. There are a small number of subtle references to Floyd's homosexuality. What effect do you think this has on the twins' relationship?
16. Iris has been shown so little unconditional kindness in her life that she doesn't immediately recognise it when Lydia offers her a day of work, food and shelter. When she does see it for what it is, how does this affect her?
17. The novel raises questions about the ethical implications of human engagement with non-native species, as seen through the characters' contemplation about and actions towards the puma Dusk and the land she inhabits. What ethical considerations do you think should inform our approaches to managing non-native species, considering both the need to protect native ecosystems and the rights and welfare of the invasive species themselves?
18. The beauty, violence and otherness of the puma Dusk fairly leap off the page in this novel. What concepts and ideas could Dusk be said to represent in a wider sense? How does the novel revolve around her?
19. At two points in the novel are a series of pages that are entirely black. What do these represent? What is their effect?
20. For a time, Iris thinks that accompanying Dusk to Patagonia in order to release her back into the wild, then making a fresh start there, might offer her and Floyd a life where they can fit in. However her conversation with Lydia (pages 234–35) casts this in a different light. What might this say about the nature of belonging, of having a place to call home? What is Lydia suggesting about the plan?
21. At the conclusion of the novel, Iris throws open the door to the cage and releases Dusk. What is her intention here, do you think? What wider meaning might this action have, both for the story specifically and as a comment on our world generally?

