

## Task for *Five Bells* by Gail Jones

### The Ending

*Five Bells* (pp. 207–209)

*And they are sinking now, all of them, into the wet sleep of the city. Rain is falling all over Sydney.*

*Catherine is still mourning her dead brother and still speaking to him in silence, summoning up his company in the torrential night.*

...

*Pei is preserving the lost child on television by magically thinking the number five.*

...

*some of us sleep backwards, always seeing what lies behind; and she falls asleep like this, reversed into her own history, seeing her own childhood and what she has lost, walking backwards, and backwards, walking forwards, backwards.*

...

*Ellie is thinking of rainfall over the Opera House, thinking of the Harbour swept shining and mystical by rain light, thinking of the time lapse of all she has known and read, and of James, and with James, ever and ever and abiding. The night has gained an enormity with the coming of the storm and in the drench she imagines it out there, Circular Quay, the vast dark water, the rain-glazed tide, the Harbour buoys with their red flares tossing messages across the water, seabirds rising up and rain coming down and the falling, falling, upon the living and the dead, ever and ever abiding. There is the musical sound of rain on her roof and Ellie is thinking, so she will remember, must ring James, must ring James, must ring, ring ...*

The ending begins and continues with present tense continuous verbs: 'are sinking', 'is mourning', 'is preserving', 'is thinking'. There is a constant movement downwards unlike the opening with 'the clear sky sloping upwards' and the sky is now raining. The scene has altered dramatically from the opening, which opened up into the scene and now is closing in with the rain. Each character is now alone, no longer surrounded by the bustle of a busy crowd. Each woman is thinking of a lost person: Catherine thinks of her brother, Pei thinks of the child and Ellie thinks of James whom she doesn't realise is now dead.

### Questions

- How is time conveyed in the ending?
- How does the ending connect to the epigraph from Slessor?  
*Where have you gone? The tide is over you,  
The turn of midnight water's over you,  
As Time is over you, and mystery,  
And memory, the flood that does not flow.*
- What is Pei 'reversed into her own history'?
- Why is the phrase 'ever and ever abiding' repeated?
- How does the ending bring together the concerns of the book?