

## Task for *The Bodysurfers*

### Guiding questions

#### Overall enquiry questions:

1. In what ways are relationships complex?
2. How is an Australian identity represented in Robert Drewe's short story collection, *The Bodysurfers*?

The following chapter-specific questions will assist you to reflect on the stories as you read them. They are designed to draw your attention to key issues. You should supplement these with your own notes about narration (voice and perspective), context and setting, characters, plot, motifs and themes, possible interpretations of the stories and the anthology overall.

Chapter	Page	Questions
Inscription		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What impressions of the beach do you get from the three very different quotations used in the inscription?</li> <li>2. What tone do these set for the anthology?</li> <li>3. Who gets to speak? Who are Manning Clark and Christopher Brennan?</li> <li>4. After reading the entire collection, what can you say about their relevance and significance?</li> </ol>
'The Manageress and the Mirage'	<b>9</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why might this story be first?</li> <li>2. How is the idea of mirage used as a metaphor in the story? How is it relevant to the story? In what ways might this be an appropriate entry point for the collection?</li> </ol>
'The Silver Medallist'	<b>15</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What sort of person is Kevin Parnell?</li> <li>2. How does Kevin Parnell get away with his behaviour for so long? What does it mean that he is a 'man's man' (p. 18)?</li> <li>3. What was the significance of the incident with the black swan?</li> <li>4. Drewe delays a crucial and shocking piece of information until the second last paragraph of the story. How does this invite the reader to reassess earlier events?</li> <li>5. Like many stories in this anthology, we see and hear what happens from the perspective of a male character. Is there evidence that this downplays the effect of men's lives on the women in their lives? For example, consider the narrator's reaction to Geraldine's revelation of rape as a 'grim revelation' (p. 22).</li> </ol>
'Shark Logic'	<b>23</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is 'shark logic'? What is its metaphorical significance in the story?</li> </ol>

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		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In what sense has the narrator 'died' (p. 25)?</li> <li>How is it significant that the narrator saves a drowning man? What is this motivation for?</li> <li>At the very end (p. 35), why does the narrator make a last-minute decision to thump 'down the receiver' (p. 35)?</li> </ol>
'Baby Oil'	<b>37</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does the bottle of baby oil come to symbolise?</li> <li>Why does Max start to put a small dot on the bottle?</li> <li>What is the significance of the 'clearly inked cross' (p. 45) in the very last line?</li> <li>How is Anthea represented in the story? How do you interpret her character?</li> </ol>
'Looking for Malibu'	<b>47</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The story starts with a (supposedly true) extract from an article in the <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> (p. 48). Why do you think 'Australians of a certain kind' travel to America - especially the West Coast? What does this say about Australians NOT of 'a specific kind'?</li> <li>What do you think explains Boyle's interests in the Langs?</li> <li>What is the significance of Malibu? Why is the family disappointed?</li> <li>What's the importance of the events at Malibu for the family?</li> <li>How does the final line change our reading of what has come before?</li> </ol>
'After Noumea'	<b>67</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is likely to have been the cause of Brian's breakdown 'late that winter' (p. 68)?</li> <li>What are the problems associated with sending the postcard to Anthea? Why do you think she doesn't answer?</li> <li>Why would the police want to speak to Brian a first time, let alone a second?</li> <li>There seems to be much more going on in this story than at first appears. Explain.</li> </ol>
'The View from the Sandhills'	<b>85</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This story is told by a first-person narrator, Paddy. Is he a reliable or unreliable narrator? What makes you say this and why do you think Drewe made this choice?</li> <li>Paddy is also misogynistic, racist and homophobic. What do you think was Drewe's purpose in creating such a reprehensible character who appears to have no sense of remorse? Does he have any redeeming features that make him relatable or likeable?</li> </ol>

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		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it valid to create stories which give characters such as Paddy a voice, instead of giving women a voice?</li> <li>How does Paddy fit into the cast of male characters created by Drewe? Do they have anything in common? If so, what does this suggest about Australian males from that era?</li> <li>What are the benefits and limitations of writing this as a monologue?</li> </ol>
'Sweetlip'	<b>93</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What's the genre for this piece?</li> <li>This is another story that plays with the idea of an unreliable narrator. Does this technique play the same role as it does in 'The View from the Sandhills'?</li> <li>Using the clues provided in the story, what do <i>you</i> think happened on Sweetlip Island?</li> <li>What might be Drewe's purpose in not providing a neat resolution to the story? What might this suggest about storytelling more generally?</li> </ol>
'The Bodysurfers'	<b>109</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is the contrast of the murder of one couple and David and Lydia's escape to the beach used?</li> <li>To what is David referring when he talks about the 'fine print' (p. 120) and 'the constant changes in the rules' (p. 120)? In David's discomfort about Lydia's nudity, what is revealed about himself and his attitudes?</li> <li>What is the significance of the long dream sequence (pp. 123–129)?</li> <li>Why do you think David acts in the way he does in the final paragraph? What is the significance of these actions (especially in light of earlier events)?</li> <li>Why do you think the title of this story was used as the title for the anthology? Is it relevant and appropriate?</li> </ol>
'Eighty Percent Humidity'	<b>131</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is Paul Lang a victim for whom we should feel sorry?</li> <li>How do you find the representation of women in this story? Consider for example Paul's comment about Faye ('her life story was full of modest lies and wide omissions' on page 133) and his description of Yvonne ('He plunges into a South Seas heaven' on page 144)?</li> <li>What's the role played by humidity in this story - the eighty percent humidity of the title?</li> <li>This is another story in which it is left to the reader's imagination to work out what happens next. To what is this effective? Does it seem like a cheat?</li> </ol>

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'The Last Explorer'	<b>147</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Early in the story we are told that 'The view of the sea is a favour they have given him [the old explorer], but he does not appreciate it' (p. 148). Why did the nursing staff see it as a favour and why does the explorer <i>not</i> see it that way?</li> <li>2. What is the significance in the old explorer turning the bed so it faces the desert - both for him personally and for the anthology of stories as a whole?</li> <li>3. This is the only chapter in which Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples are mentioned. What is revealed by the way they are represented (see pages 149 and 152)?</li> </ol>
'Stingray'	<b>157</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does David mean when he says: 'Something miraculous happens [...] when you dive into the surf at Bondi after a bad summer's day' (p. 158)? How does this align with your own experience?</li> <li>2. Why does David say to Victoria: 'Let's keep it a stingray' (p. 165)?</li> <li>3. Would you agree that this is a humorous story that plays with images of both Australia and masculinity?</li> <li>4. Was this a good choice as the last story in the collection? Why or why not?</li> </ol>