

The Byron Journals

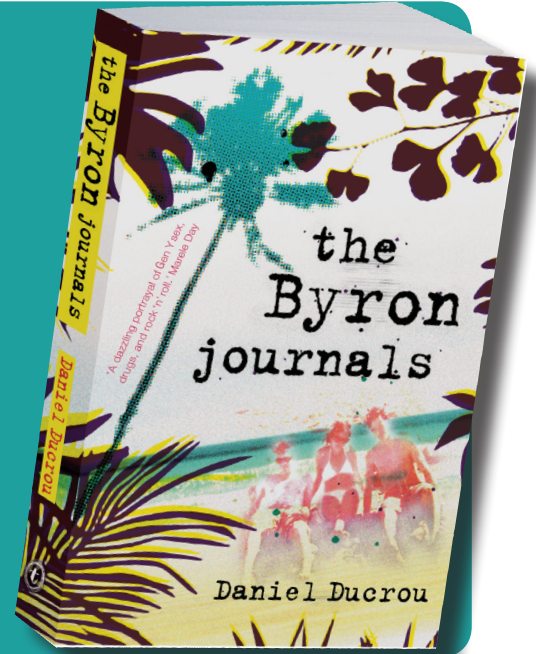
Daniel Ducrou

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Fiction, B paperback
Recommended for Upper Secondary



Resource Kit Contains

- Synopsis
- Author information
- Reading, writing and drama exercises
- Questions for discussion/essay topics
- Research questions



Praise

'Brave and tender...a real insider's story about vulnerability.' Kalinda Ashton

Synopsis

Andrew and his mate Benny have finished school and are heading for the holiday of their lives in Byron Bay. They are not sure what they're looking forward to most: the surf, the girls, the music, the partying or just being away from Adelaide.

Andrew is looking forward to leaving Adelaide because he wants to distance himself from his parents—their addictions and infidelities. He cuts himself off from Benny too and uses the trip as a way to leave his problems behind.

He meets Heidi, Jade and Tim. He joins their band and moves into their house. They are part of the wildness of the Byron landscape and Andrew disappears into this wildness for a time. His days are a mix of music and drugs and conversation and love. Heidi is a girl he wants to understand but can't. Like him, she has come to Byron to forget things. In this complicated living situation, Andrew disappears into the wildness of himself, realising that he's capable of failing in the same way his parents have.

The Byron Journals explores raw relationships in which jealousy, guilt, anger and love coexist. It allows teenagers the opportunity to discuss how sex and friendship are complicated. They're even more complicated when drugs and alcohol are in the mix.

The narrative rolls forward, beautiful and discordant like the songs that Tim, Heidi and Andrew play. The final scenes are foreshadowed but not obvious. The end is hopeful but not neat.

Importantly for class study, *The Byron Journals* shows that the world is complicated. That actions have consequence. That life is messy. It's a great novel for students to explore the tangled landscape of human nature.

About the Author

Daniel Ducrou is a young Melbourne writer currently working on the Aboriginal History of Fitzroy project and the Smith Street Community Plan. *The Byron Journals* was shortlisted for the 2007 Australian/Vogel Literary Prize and the 2008 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards for an Unpublished Manuscript. Daniel is working on his second novel.

Daniel maintains a website at www.danielducrou.com.

ACTIVITIES

Reading Journal

As you read *The Byron Journals*, keep your own journal. Make notes on some or all of the things listed below.

- Your opinion of the issues raised
- Questions you would like to discuss
- Similarities and differences between yourself and the characters
- Predictions about upcoming events

Pre-reading Activities

- Andrew and his mate Benny have just finished high school—now they're flying to Byron Bay to celebrate. Make some predictions about what

might happen in the novel. What things are sure to happen in Schoolies Week?

- Andrew feels as though music can help him survive anything. Make a list of songs for the good and the bad times.
- What things have helped you survive the bad times?
- The characters in this novel take a lot of risks. What risks have you taken lately? What ones have you decided not to take? What ones did you wish you hadn't taken?
- In what ways do drugs both simplify and complicate things?
- Where do you see yourself the year after high school?
- What qualities do you consider essential in a relationship? How important are the things listed below?
 1. Honesty
 2. Loyalty
 3. Fidelity
 4. Sobriety (Alcohol and drug free)
- In *The Byron Journals*, the characters try to escape the legacy of their parents. How important is upbringing in determining character? At what point do people have to take responsibility for their actions? In what ways are you like your family? In what ways do you wish you were different from them?

Reading Activities

- Re-read chapter one. Why do you think the landscape and people of Byron Bay appeal to Andrew? After you have read the novel, comment on what Byron represents for the main characters.
- There is a slow building of tension in the novel, created by tiny moments that explore character and foreshadow events. What does chapter five show about the power balance in Andrew and Heidi's relationship? How might the last paragraph foreshadow events in the rest of the novel?
- As you read the novel, discuss the dangers that might lie ahead for the characters. In your opinion, what emotions or events could destroy their friendships? What inevitable event are they heading towards?
- Discuss Andrew's actions in chapter five. Do you think they're justified? What do Heidi's actions indicate about her state of mind? What is the significance of the hair-cutting scene?
- Discuss the scene where Jade takes Andrew's picture amongst the dope plants. What does this show about Andrew's character?
- On page 70, Jade comments that Andrew has brought things back into balance. Is this how you view things?
- '...I didn't know you were into coke.' (p.73) Andrew will deal dope but not coke. He will take drugs but will not drink alcohol. He will look at Jade, but hate his father for cheating on his mother. What level of sympathy do you have for Andrew? Does it change throughout the novel?
- Read the scene in chapter ten where we first meet Ananda. Is the writer positioning the reader to feel a certain way about him? (Consider his actions, the type of joint he rolls, the dialogue.) Discuss the contradictions that this scene reveals in Tim's character.
- Discuss Ananda's description of his acid experience. Based on this description, why would someone want to take the drug? What damage can it do to a person? Ananda comments to Andrew, 'You can't just switch it off.' How is the acid experience symbolic of Andrew's life?
- 'Men are just stupid. You're like dogs. All you think about is food and sex.' (p.108) What's your opinion of Jade's comment?
- What do you think the writer wants you to feel in chapter ten? Consider things such as the description of the smell and the quantity of drugs, the music playing, the conversations and the police knocking at the door.
- Discuss chapter 12. What tensions exist between the characters? What's your opinion of Heidi slipping Andrew drugs? Discuss the dynamics of Heidi, Jade, Andrew and Tim's relationship.
- Are the drugs to blame for Andrew's infidelity in chapter 13? Should he tell Heidi about what happened with Jade? Why or why not?
- Discuss Heidi and Andrew's conversation about the fragility of life. What does this scene show about her character? What does it show about his character? Are they similar in any way? How does this conversation reflect the themes of the novel?
- On page 142 Andrew comments that Byron is his new life now. Is it possible for a person to separate himself or herself from the past? Do you think Andrew is doing this effectively?
- On page 153, Heidi gives her opinion about Jade's stripping. What's your opinion? Do you think Jade does this purely for money? Why might it be more complicated? Discuss the ways in which Heidi and Jade's friendship is both supportive and destructive. How would you describe Tim and Jade's relationship?
- Discuss the scene in the doctor's surgery. What cracks does it reveal in their relationship? How does it show Andrew's naivety? Do you sympathise with Andrew or Heidi? Why?

- Discuss Heidi's desperate desire to be hit. Why does she want this? Discuss the other ways her anger appears in the novel. Some are outright, as shown on page 177. Some are subtler and are directed inwards.
- Despite Heidi's frailties, she is a strong character. Do you agree?
- After reading up to chapter 19, discuss the ways that Andrew has changed so far in the novel. Has he actually grown up at all?
- Read the scene on page 188 where Heidi almost drowns. Why does Heidi treat Andrew in the way she does? Is her treatment of him fair? Why or why not?
- After reading the whole novel, re-read this scene on page 188. How does it serve to foreshadow final events? Reassess why Heidi reacts in the way she does. Has your opinion of her changed? How does this scene reflect the themes of the novel?
- After reading chapter 21, make some predictions about why Heidi wants to go to Melbourne.
- In chapters 22 and 23, Andrew gives in to everything he is fighting against. This is also the moment when he begins to grow up. Discuss.
- Discuss Andrew's confession to Heidi. What more does it reveal about her secret? Does Andrew's insobriety excuse his actions? Why or why not?
- Why are Belinda and Emily significant? What do they represent?
- Discuss chapter 29. How does Ducrou build suspense here? Why does Andrew agree to do the pick up? Contrast this chapter with the scene at the beginning of the novel where Andrew posed with the dope. What does Phil reveal about Andrew? How does Andrew and Heidi's relationship shift in this chapter?
- Do you agree with Tim? Does Andrew need to see his parents? How is the fish symbolic of more than Marcus?
- What really happened to Heidi's mum? How does this explain her actions in the novel?
- On page 304, Heidi comments that Byron is different. How is it different?
- In chapter 36, we see that Andrew's mother hasn't really changed, and yet the end of the novel is hopeful. Do you agree?
- The end of the novel is a beautiful combination of music and landscape. Why has the author chosen to end in this way?
- On a timeline, map the moments that lead towards Andrew's realisation that he must go home.

Debate Topics

- 'I just don't understand how she defends murderers, paedophiles and psychopaths.' (p.16) Every person deserves a legal defence.
- Being like our parents, at least in some small way, is inevitable.
- Some futures cannot be changed.
- On page 106, Andrew's dad comments: 'Life is messy, Andrew. People grow and change and make mistakes. The world is filled with so much deception—the least we can do is speak truthfully to each other.' Telling the truth always helps.
- To learn anything you have to risk something.
- Marijuana should be decriminalised across all states in Australia.

Discussion/Essay Topics

- As a class, discuss your opinion of drug taking, carrying and selling. Why do the characters in *The Byron Journals* take drugs? Why do they carry them? Think beyond their monetary reasons.
- Andrew goes to Byron Bay to escape his parents but he doesn't actually escape them at all. Discuss.
- *The Byron Journals* is about the struggle to survive the legacy of parents. Do you agree?
- 'Now he's just lost up here, stuck in his own private hell,' Heidi comments on page 26 about the lawyer in Byron Bay. Discuss the private hells explored in *The Byron Journals*.
- Despite the private hells explored in *The Byron Journals*, the book is essentially hopeful. Do you agree?
- 'Life is messy, Andrew. People grow and change and make mistakes. The world is filled with so much deception—the least we can do is speak truthfully to each other.' (p.106) It's only when the characters are honest with each other that their relationships begin to move forward. Do you agree?
- Andrew might change by the end of the novel, but many of the characters do not. Discuss.
- 'I used to be high on life too...but then I developed a tolerance.' (p.114). Discuss each character's reasons for becoming lost in the world of Byron.
- Heidi's life since her mother died has been about punishment. Discuss.
- 'Andrew marvelled at their talent for blocking out the past.' (p.271) Andrew moves forward because he can go back.
- Byron might represent freedom to the characters but this isn't what it delivers. Discuss.

Drama Activity: Acting it out

Choose one character from *The Byron Journals*. Write a monologue in which the character explains what they fear, desire and regret. Explain the ways they try to forget the world. Perform this for the class. Use one prop to symbolise what you see as the most important thing about this character.

Alternative Drama Activities

Imagine that Andrew is caught and charged with drug trafficking. In groups, plan the defence and prosecution. Perform the trial for the class.

Imagery/Symbolism

- Discuss how Ducrou uses landscape to mirror mood and theme in his novel, for example, the fig tree with heavy black fruit on page 174.
- Contrast the landscape described in chapter 29 with the landscape of Byron. How are these landscapes symbolic of extremes of human existence? Is there a way to live between the two?
- How does Andrew's music mirror the way he's living? How does the music he makes with Heidi and Tim symbolise the beauty and discord of their relationships?
- Discuss the scenes in the novel where the characters are taking drugs. How are they similar (in some ways) to the scenes where the characters are lost in their music? What do these scenes highlight about the lives of the characters?

Research Questions

- Choose one of the drugs used by the characters in *The Byron Journals* and research the physical and mental effects of it on the individual.
- Research the wider impact of drug trafficking on the local and global community.
- Research Byron Bay from indigenous inhabitants to white settlement, finishing with the current day.
- Using at least four forms of media, analyse how the press represents Schoolies Week.
OR
Choose another issue that impacts on young people and analyse how the press represents this.

Writing Activities

- The characters in *The Byron Journals* are lost in many ways. Write about a time when you felt lost.
- Write a story where you foreshadow what is to come through the description of the landscape or weather.
- Andrew's passion for music runs through the book. Write about a passion that you have.
- Write a letter from Andrew to Benny to explain why he acted the way he did in Byron Bay.
- Write the words of Heidi's song to her mother.
- Andrew's descriptions of Byron are detailed and evocative. Go to Daniel Ducrou's website and read 'Ode to Byron'. Use this form to write a piece about a place that you love.
- The author lists a number of future possibilities that 'the dead girl' might have embraced. What do you think she went on to do?