

# TEACHER'S RESOURCE KIT

## *Longacre Press NZ Young Adult Fiction*

# The Sea-wreck Stranger

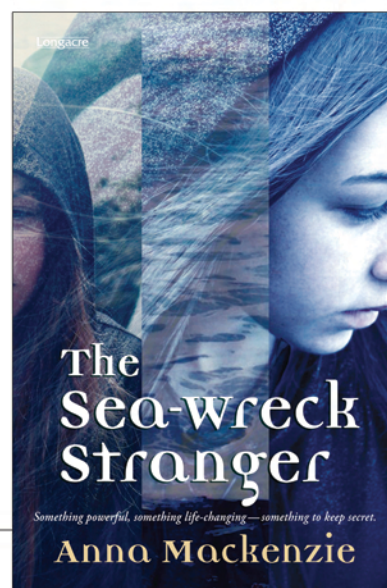
Anna Mackenzie

*'Our sea-wreck stranger doesn't stand much of a chance, not on Dunnett Island...'*

Ness, Ty and their cousin Sophie live in a small island community: a community that has turned its back on the sea, and on its own past.

When the arrival of a stranger forces all three to question the world they know — a world dominated by superstition, fear and loss — they each have a choice to make. Rebelling against the harsh austerity of her life, Ness chooses to follow the sea currents running in her blood. It proves a choice that risks everything — including her own life.

With its strong cast of characters, Anna Mackenzie's perceptive, enigmatic novel will have you firmly in its grip.



### SPECIFICATIONS:

Imprint: Longacre Press  
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Readership: 12 years and older

### RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

*Information about the author; author statement; questions for reading comprehension; questions for character study; questions for language study; topics for creative response*

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Teachers' notes by Raymond Huber

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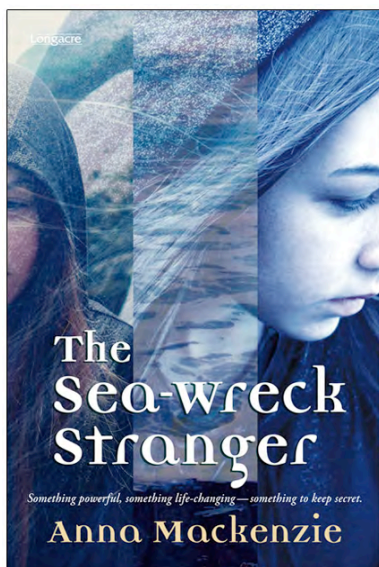
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## About the Author:

**Anna Mackenzie** is a full-time writer and editor with a strong sense of place and a love of rugged landscapes. She lives on a farm in Hawke's Bay with her husband and two children, additionally enjoying the occasional presence of her various nineteen nieces and nephews. Anna says she can't remember a time when she didn't write, but it is only in the last five years that she has turned her attention to writing for children and young adults – which she has found she loves.

Her first novel, *High Tide*, was featured in the children's Literature Foundation List of Notable Books of 2003. Her second novel, *Out on the Edge*, for young adults, was published by Longacre Press in 2005 (and is under film option). In 2006 Anna received a grant from Creative NZ to assist in completing her third novel, *The Sea-Wreck Stranger*. She has additionally written five short books and various stories for Learning Media Ltd, has finished a fourth novel and is currently working on a fifth.

Anna also undertakes editing contracts, is a member of the local school board of trustees and, very occasionally, helps out on the farm. Her hobbies include cycling, cooking and reading. She has a degree in psychology from Victoria University and confesses a deep and abiding interest in people.



## Author Statement:

The opening chapters of *The Sea-Wreck Stranger* came to me as I watched a group of children rummaging amongst flotsam at the edge of a lake. What would happen, I asked myself, if children found something powerful, life-changing, challenging – something they had to keep secret. Something that would cause them to question the world they thought they knew.

The world I gave to Ness, Ty and Sophie is harsh and regimented. Their lives are proscribed by the decisions of their elders and the errors of the past. Despite this, they blossom into characters with strength and clarity. The relationship between them grows and changes as they each find their own path to independence.

The idea at the heart of *The Sea-Wreck Stranger* – that the world of the future might be bleak rather than “advanced” – is an idea I’ve always thought worth exploring. Ness’ world is one option. Dev’s is another. There are countless variations. One of the joys of writing is that you can explore potential as well as reality, merging and shuffling to suit. Another is that stories don’t always take you where you expect to go.

*Anna Mackenzie*

## Comprehension Questions:

- Why does Sophie seem to be favoured? (p. 7)
- Why might the bay be forbidden? (p. 8)
- Who has died?
- What is 'teck'? What is being 'cleansed'? (p. 12)
- Why might the water be poisoned? (p. 13)
- Why are people afraid of sea-wreck? (p. 14)
- What might have happened in the rest of the world?
- What does 'galvanise' mean? (p. 17)
- What are the 'secrets aplenty' on the island? (p. 20)
- Why are strangers feared on the island? (p. 23)
- Do the children feel the sea is evil? (p. 26)
- What risks are they taking?
- What are Marn's plans for the farm? (p. 31)
- How does Ness know so much about nursing? (p. 35)
- How does Ness feel about the Barritts? Why? (p. 40)
- What do we know of Colm so far? (p. 42)
- Why is farming so vital to the islanders? (p. 42)
- What does 'blood and breath' mean? (p. 42)
- Why is Ness angry? (p. 45)
- What's Elsie like? (pp 49, 50)
- Why is Marn keen on Ness marrying Jed? (pp 55, 56)
- Why does Marn's grin upset her so much? (p. 56)
- Why is Ness feeling so trapped and angry? (pp 59, 60)
- Where does she find a flicker of hope? (p. 61)
- What might Colm be talking to Merryn about? (p. 68)
- What might the islanders do to Devdan if they find him? (p. 77)
- Why does Ness go out to look for the missing goat? (p. 83)
- What is Ness suffering from? (p. 89)
- Why did Marn come looking for her? (pp 89, 96)
- Why is the storm damage so concerning? (p. 93)
- How does Marn feel about Merryn? (p. 94)
- Why isn't Merryn concerned about rumours? (p. 99)
- Why is plastic forbidden? (p. 104)
- Why doesn't Dev understand the dangers? (p. 105)
- What was likely to have been Dev's job? (p. 106)
- Did Marn say he would force Ness to marry? (p. 113)
- Why can't Ness confide in Ty? (p. 115)
- What does Dev want to say to the Council? (pp 118, 119)
- How does Ness escape from Jed? (p. 129)
- How would fishing change life on the island? (p. 132)
- Why doesn't Ness tell Sophie about Dev? (p. 135)
- What is Dev's plan? (p. 139)
- What is a 'lynch mob'? (p. 149)
- How does Sophie save Ness? (p. 163)
- Why is Ton angry with Jed? (p. 164)
- Why is Tilda so wild? (p. 170)
- Why does Ness tell Marn the truth? (pp 172–173)
- How does Merryn help Ness? Why? (p. 188)
- Is Merryn safe now? (p. 190)
- How might the boat have got there? (p. 199)
- Why does Ness want to leave the island? (p. 200)

## Themes:

### 1. Social Control:

- What forms of government and social control are there on the island? (p. 12) Why has this system developed? (p. 32)
- Why would books and teck have been burned? (p. 12)
- Is strict social control (the Bans) a reasonable response to a disaster?
- How does the Council also use fear to keep control? (p. 120)

- Why did the Nazis burn books during WW2?
- Read *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. Why are books burned in the future in this story?
- What countries in the world currently have a government that restricts people's freedoms?
- Can people be completely controlled?
- Debate Topic: 'People need to be controlled.'

## 2. The Future:

- When does it become clear this novel is set in the future?
- How far in the future might it be?
- Why are they anti-technology on the island? (p. 71)
- Why are many people wary of technology today? For example, nuclear energy, genetically engineered food, cell phone radiation.
- What might make people turn against technology?
- Debate topic: 'Technology will save us.'
- What kind of society does Dev come from? (pp 121–123.)
- What has happened to the big cities? Describe how this could happen in reality if we don't take action now.
- Why might the fish be poisoned? (pp 32, 122)

## 3. Witch-hunts:

- Merryn is a 'wise woman': known for her wise sayings and herbal cures – so why is Merryn regarded with suspicion? (pp 41, 47, 71)
- What is Merryn's view on life? (p. 50)
- Why does Ness have an affinity for Merryn? (pp 47, 48). What strong personality traits do they share?
- The setting of the novel is similar to social conditions in the Middle Ages. What became of wise women (witches) in medieval times?
- What is the popular meaning of 'witch-hunt' today? Why do people start witch-hunts?
- Read *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth Speare.

## Character Study:

### Ness:

- Draw a family tree for Ness, based on information in chapter 1.
- Ness keeps her feelings 'tamped down'. (p. 8) Why?
- What does Ness think of the Council? (p. 12)
- Why does she say the stranger has been 'given to her'? (p. 19)
- Why does she become so quickly attached to him? What does Dev represent to Ness? (pp 23, 44, 51)
- How does Ness usually work through her problems and worries? (e.g. pp 59–61)
- How does Ness defend herself against Jed's advances? (pp 64, 65)
- Give examples of her strength of character. For example, dealing with the injured Dev, with Jed (p. 128), and with Colm (p. 70). What in her past has made her strong?
- How is Ness changing (developing) during the novel? 'Marn has brought me up against the end of childhood' (p. 80) – what does she mean by this?
- Why does Ness feel she doesn't belong any more? (p. 182)
- Is Ness a convincing, fully rounded character? Give examples to support your answer.

### Other Characters:

- What do we learn about the relationships between main characters on page 7?
- **Tilda** is described as bitter and 'tetchy' – what does this mean?
- Read the descriptions of Tilda on page 8 and 28, and sketch her sour face.
- Why is Tilda so hard on Ness?
- What is Tilda's view of children? (p. 30)
- Why is Tilda so keen on stirring up trouble? (pp 109, 110)
- **Sophie** develops during the story – how does she change?
- Why is Sophie reluctant to help Dev initially?
- How does Sophie reveal her boldness? (pp 18, 147, 148)

- What is **Jed** like? (pp 64–66). Has he any positive attributes?
- What are the Barritts like? (p. 55)

## Exploring Language:

### 1. Simile and metaphors

Similes and metaphors are used to describe emotions. Illustrate one of these feelings using symbols:

- ‘honey-sweet excitement’ (p. 8)
- ‘A shiver runs like ants up my spine’ (p. 23)
- ‘Heart beats like gull’s wings in my chest’ (p. 52)

Physical features are described with vivid natural imagery. Create a cartoon character with one (or all) of these features:

- ‘legs as spindly as a heron’s’ (p. 13)
- Moving ‘like an inside-out spider’ (p. 17)
- A ‘voice snakes across the yard’ (p. 39)
- ‘Grin as broad as a late pickle’ (p. 56)
- ‘fingers creeping like a bunch of fat worms’ (p. 65)

Write your own similes and metaphors based on these animals: butterflies, monkey, fish, weta, shark, slug, cat.

### 2. Writing Style

- The story is told in the First Person. What effect might this have on the reader? How does it help the reader get inside the character?
- Rewrite the following passage in Third Person: ‘His fingers crush my wrist, so that I feel the bones grate. My voice rises to a shriek. ‘Stop!’... My arm feels like to break. I kick out hard, aiming for his injured leg. As my boot connects he cries out, falling back, and I’m free...’ (p. 43)
- Does Third Person distance you from the character? Which style do you prefer?
- Is Ness a reliable narrator? Is she ever wrong in her judgements of people? (e.g. her opinions of Sophie (p. 9), and Marn (p. 95)).
- Action is conveyed effectively through verbs. For example, on page 85, the paragraph beginning: ‘I’ve almost reached the top when I lose my footing...’. Identify the verbs in the

passage. Why are they so important? Use the same verbs to write a different action sequence, of your own creation.

## Creative Responses:

- The plot is open-ended when Ness and Dev sail away. Will they reach the mainland? What will they find? Write the next chapter of their adventure.
- How much do you rely on technology? Imagine a world without digital technology, electricity, plastics or modern transport. Write a diary of a typical day in your life without technological aids.
- Landscape is important in the story. Draw a map of the bay area (p. 11). Paint a picture of the landscape as you imagine it to be.
- Write a personal review of the book. Consider the following questions:
  - What situations had a ring of truth for you?
  - Which characters appealed to you the most? The least?
  - How did the story make you feel as it unfolded?
  - What awakened your imagination in the book?
  - What did you dislike, or find boring?
  - What did you think of the ending?

## Genre:

- What does the word ‘apocalyptic’ mean?
- What genre is this? Science fiction, fantasy, apocalyptic, realism?
- This is mostly a realistic story, with some futuristic elements. Describe the difference between these two main elements using examples from the book. What effects do they both have on you as a reader?
- The isolated island is a favourite setting for writers of the ‘social fantasy’ genre – it allows them to set up a ‘mini’ alternative world. Read *Riding Tycho* by Jan Mark. What are the similarities/differences between the two novels?
- Read *The Islanders* by John Rowe Townsend. What is the equivalent of the Council and the Bans?