

# RANDOM HOUSE TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

## Ebony Hill

Anna Mackenzie

Ness is looking out to sea, waiting for the arrival of Dev. It's been two years since the two set out in a dinghy, escaping the wrath of the islanders of Dunnett; two years since their shrivelled and sun-battered bodies were coaxed back to health by Dev's people.

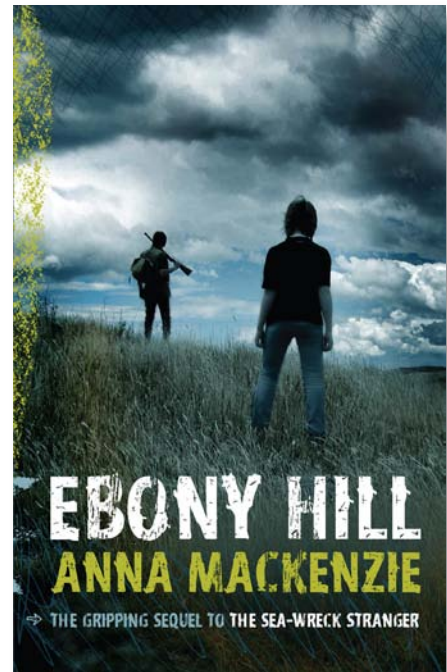
Ness's new home, the city of Vidya, is in ruins; the air is unsafe, and the buildings scarred by fire. Towers loom empty and hollow. The community of Vidya is bravely building a new society and Ness yearns to find a place where she might belong.

Sent to work on the home farms, Ness becomes caught up in surprise attacks and ongoing land battles. Working tirelessly in the medic room at Ebony Hill, she helps mend the wounded and worse. Questioning the treatment of prisoners and witnessing the realities of war challenges Ness's commitment to this brave new society. Will she find a place for herself here?

A stunning sequel to *The Sea-wreck Stranger*, *Ebony Hill* is a gripping and suspenseful novel. It's packed with a standout cast of characters and explores not only the harshness of war but the resilience of the human spirit.



Anna Mackenzie is a full-time writer and editor who lives on a farm in the Hawke's Bay. *Ebony Hill* is her fifth novel for young adults. *The Sea-wreck Stranger* won an Honour Award in the 2008 NZ Post Children's Book Awards, and was Joint Winner of the Sir Julius Vogel Award for Science Fiction in the same year.



### SPECIFICATIONS:

Imprint: Longacre Child  
Classification: NZ YA Fiction  
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Format: Paperback  
Extent: 208pp  
Readership: 14+

### RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Pre-reading questions
- Language
- Characters
- Themes
- Comprehension

## Before reading

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1. What does the cover picture indicate that the book is about?
2. When and where might the story be set?
3. What does the title suggest to you?

## Language

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1. Figurative language is used to convey ideas that might otherwise be difficult to express. Two examples of figurative language are metaphors and similes. Examples of these are, '...the buildings of the old university spill down the hillside like a tumbled stack of blocks...' (p. 7) and 'The sky is taut-bellied...' (p.12). Find more examples of each type of figurative language in the book.

pasture, like a draught horse too old to pull the plough.' (p.10) and '...she shimmers like a honey bee at the heart of a hive.' (p.23) Find two more examples of animal imagery in the book. Write a simile using each of the following animals: kangaroo, weta, peacock, antelope, lion.
2. What do you think the genre of this book is? List the aspects that are indicative of this genre.
3. The story is told in first person. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Was it effective? Choose one of the passages in the book and rewrite it in third person narrative.
4. The author uses symbolism in the book. What might the following phrase symbolise, 'He puffs up like a rooster...' (p.46)? Think of three other examples of symbolism.
5. The author uses personification to help describe emotions. For example, '...the grief that squeezed my heart.' (p.10) and 'Rage lights a flame in my belly.' (p.61). Write a sentence using personification for the following emotions: fear, anger and joy.
6. The author uses animal imagery in similes. For example, '...he'd been put out to
7. The author uses food imagery in similes. For example, '...my insides feel like butter left to melt in the sun.' (p.21) and 'Tension builds in the house till it feels thick as honey,' (p.151). Think of ten other types of food and create a simile for each.
8. What type of noun is 'gaggle' in the phrase a 'gaggle of girls...' (p.22). What creature is the word 'gaggle' usually associated with? Think of examples of this figure of speech for the following creatures: crows, bears, locusts, leopards and jellyfish.
9. The novel is full of military and medical vocabulary. For example, 'reccy' (p.135) and 'diagnosis' (p.208). Find more examples of each from the novel.
10. Esha makes a pun on the word 'malls' calling them 'consume-alls' (p.11). Think of three examples of puns — and the context they would work in.
11. What figure of speech is the following word, 'squishing' (p.23)? Write a poem or descriptive paragraph that includes three more examples of this figure of speech.

12. Choose one of the descriptive passages in the novel which you find particularly effective and use it to set the scene or mood for your own piece of descriptive writing. Quote the passage as the epigraph for your work (i.e. clearly state the source: title, author, publisher, date, chapter and page number).
13. When describing the attack on Home Farm the author successfully creates tension and suspense (pp. 93–96). What techniques does the author use to heighten the suspense? Write your own description of a suspenseful event.
14. Find definitions for the following words which are taken from the novel and write one sentence for each: 'wily' (p.11), 'forfeit' (p.18), 'amend' (p.22), 'precipitate' (p.26), 'petulant' (p.28), 'waifs' (p.29), 'gaudy' (p.32), 'obliquely' (p.41), 'dilapidated' (p.44), 'languid' (p.52), 'altruistic' (p.53), 'affinity' (p.53), 'askew' (p.61), 'mundane' (p.79), 'surreptitiously' (p.87), 'forlornly' (p.138), 'augmented' (p.151), 'churlish' (p.172).

## Characters

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1. Think of three adjectives to describe Ness.
2. List the qualities of Ness' personality and find examples of when she displays each of these qualities.
3. How has Ness changed and developed by the end of the book?
4. What are the different pressures on Ness through the novel? What factors lead to the decisions she makes and how does she cope with the situations she finds herself in?
5. How does Ness and Ronan's relationship change through the novel? What role does the war have on this?
6. Marta claims Ness idolises Dev (p.26). Is this true? Does this change through the novel? When and why does Ness have a realisation about her relationship with Dev?
7. Marta is Ness' mentor (p.9). Do other mentor figures appear throughout the novel for Ness?
8. Who does Ness consider as her family? Does this equate to how other characters feel towards her?
9. Describe Ness' reaction to the following events:
  - The arrival of Ronan.
  - The death of Esha.
  - The killing of the man on the road.
  - Being called an islander.
  - The treatment of the prisoners.
  - Leaving Home Farm.
10. What does the novel say about community and its importance during difficult times? List examples of episodes when community has been either a help or a hindrance to Ness.
11. Draw a picture of one of the characters based on their physical descriptions. For example, Esha (pp.13–5), Ronan (p.17), Marta (p.25) or Lynd (p.87).
12. Write a character study of one of the following:
  - Truso
  - Ronan
  - Saice
  - Farra
13. Which character do you most identify with and why?

# Themes

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Discuss the following themes and find examples from the book which illustrate each:

- Forms of social control
- The futility of war
- The future of our planet
- Environmental sustainability

# Comprehension

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1. This novel is the sequel to *The Sea-wreck Stranger*. Write a one page summary of the previous book to explain to readers what the first book is about.
  2. Choose another sequel from literature. Write a description of the book and/or an author study.
  3. What is the genre of this book? List the aspects that are indicative of the genre.
- Chapter One:**
4. Ness looks out over the ruins of Vidya (p.7). Draw a map of the ruins. Paint a picture of the area as you imagine it.
  5. Research another famous ruin. Explore ideas such as, how it came to be a ruin, what is left, what it tells us of the society that used to inhabit the area. Present your findings to the class.
  6. 'The university is Vidya's heart and purpose.' (p.7). How does this compare to Dunnett Island Council's view of learning and knowledge? What do you think is the heart and purpose of your school, home town and/or country?
  7. The motto of Vidya's university is found above the archive doors (p.7). What is the motto of your school and where is it found? Devise a new one.
  8. For Ness the taste of salt evokes a memory of Dunnett Island and her family (p.8). How does she feel about being away from the island? Write down some tastes or smells and the memories that you associate with them.
  9. Anjan and Ness discuss the research areas found at Vidya. For example, land-sci, sea-sci, med-sci, food-sci and ag-sci (p.9 & p.20). At this point in the novel which area of research do you think Ness will most likely choose as her placement and why? What would the names of the equivalent fields of study be in today's society? Which area of study would you be drawn to and why?
  10. Jago, Anjan's grandfather was the head archivist of Vidya (p.9). What does an archivist's job entail?
  11. Jago records the stories of all newcomers to the community (p.9). Interview someone who is new to your school and/or town about their first impressions and feelings of their new community.
  12. Ness relates how her and Dev's bodies were '...shrivelled and sun-battered...' after being lost at sea (p.10). Find another account of people who were lost at sea.

What happened to them physically and mentally? How did they survive?

13. Ness imagines what is happening on Dunnett Island (p.12). Write a description of your home and family.
14. Dev believes the northern fishing grounds would be safe again (p.13). Where are the fishing areas around New Zealand? What are the laws and regulations surrounding them? Which species of fish are allowed to be fished and which methods are permitted to be used?
15. Esha mentions that fish would make a difference to their diet that she would welcome (p.13). What benefits does including fish in your diet have? Create a pamphlet outlining these benefits.
16. Ness recalls how on Dunnett Island books were burned (p.13). What other regime in history burned books and why? If you were able to save two books from being burned which would they be and why?
17. The sea-sci team studies the '...migratory paths and habitats... of fish' (p.17). Choose a species of fish or sea creature. Research its migratory paths, feeding rituals and habitats. Present your findings to your class.
18. If Ness had stayed on Dunnett Island she would have been forced to marry Jed in an arrangement to bring the two farms together (p.23). How did she feel about this? Which cultures practise arranged marriages? Do you agree or disagree with this custom and why?

### **Chapter Two:**

19. Ness goes to the archive as a respite from the bustle of the city (p.26). How does she find living in the city? What does she like/dislike? Where do you go when you need a respite?

20. Ronan and his family were found adrift in a boat (p.28). Choose three countries and find out their policies concerning migrants and/or immigration laws.
21. Ebony Hill is one of Vidya's satellite settlements (p.30). Choose one of the main cities in New Zealand and place it and its satellite settlements on a map. Research the names, population sizes, economy, industry, etc. of the city and settlements you have chosen.

### **Chapter Three:**

22. Before its collapse Vidya had '...more people than it seems possible could exist in one place – or at all.' (p.33). What is currently the largest populated city in the world? Locate it on a world map. At what rate is the world's population increasing daily/annually? Is this growth sustainable?
23. Ness travels to Home Farm on a 'jigger' (p.34). When has she ridden on something similar? Draw a picture of this mode of transport.
24. The hill blocks and Home Farm '... supply more than two-thirds of the city's food...' (p.35). What do New Zealand farms produce? How much of it is for domestic purposes and/or international export? What percentage of the world grows food and to whom is it supplied? Do you think this distribution is fair?
25. The founders decided to build the community in the old university (p.35). Why did they make this choice? Where would you choose as a site if you were to build a new community and why?
26. After the collapse, toxins and toxic sites have been left behind (p.35). Which toxins do you think could be a potential threat to the future safety of the planet? What measures are being taken to control these?

27. The jigger goes past a town that was wiped out by an explosion in a chemical plant, as well as a dead lake (p.40). What comfort does Esha give Ness as they pass this area? Research a famous industrial disaster, including its cause and the effects (both immediate and on-going) on the area and its inhabitants.
28. The farmhouse and sheds have solar panels on their roofs (p.45). What sustainable technology is and/or could be used around your home, school, town or city?
29. Why does Ness feel like ‘...a little of the tight-wound spring inside...’her begins to uncoil when she arrives at Home Farm (p.45)? Is there a location that has this effect on you? Describe it in a paragraph and/or poem.

#### **Chapter Four:**

30. Ness informs Esha about using honey for medicinal purposes (p.47). From whom did Ness learn this information? What is honey a successful natural remedy for? What other natural remedies do you know of?
31. Esha tells Ness about the use of bio-fuel to heat the pool of the bath-house at Home Farm (p.48). Where else does Ness feel this technology could help? Research types of bio-fuel and what they are currently used for.
32. There is a communal bath-house at Home Farm (p.48). Which cultures still use communal bath-houses and why?
33. Dunnett Island’s Council had ‘teck’ outlawed (p.50). Why are many people wary of technology, such as, nuclear energy, genetically engineered food, cell phone radiation?
34. Ness comments that it is the Dunnett Council members ‘... own narrow minds that place limits on their world...’ (p.50). Why does she think this? For which sectors of society in the world, if any, do you think this comment rings true and why?

#### **Chapter Five:**

35. The people on farms use cycles as transport as they believe they are a form of sustainable transport (p.54). Think of other examples of sustainable transport that has been/are being developed.
36. Ness and Ronan have to learn to ride bikes (pp.54–55). How do they feel about this? Design an instructional pamphlet to explain how to ride a bike to an absolute beginner.
37. Ness feels that finding an open community at Summertops must have been a relief for the early settlers (p.58). Did she have a similar experience when she arrived in Vidya? Who were the early settlers in your area of New Zealand? Where did they come from and why did they leave their home country? Where, when and how did they arrive? What conditions did they face upon arrival? What did they do when they arrived?

#### **Chapter Six:**

38. Ronan mentions the possibility of their attackers being para-militaries (p.67). What are para-militaries? What do you think they are fighting for in the novel?
39. After the horror of Esha’s death, Ronan advises Ness to think of the best thing that ever happened to her (p.67). What does she choose? What is one of the best things that has ever happened to you? Write a descriptive paragraph or poem based on your choice.

#### **Chapter Seven:**

41. Ness listens to the rules of the farm’s

security alert policy (p.76). Why are these important for the community? Write out the emergency procedures at your school in case of an event such as an earthquake, fire, etc.

42. The Decon declares 'martial law' (p.83). What does this phrase mean? Do you think it is necessary for the community?

### **Chapter Eight:**

43. In the fight Ness holds the weapon like a talisman (p.95). How is she feeling? What does she have as a weapon? What is a talisman? What are other examples of a talisman?
44. Truso explains to Ness that the scouts had created a trap (p.99). Do you think it was a smart tactic? Research a famous ambush from a past war.

### **Chapter Nine:**

45. Ronan and Ness discuss how she killed the man on the road (p.107). What reasoning does Ronan use to support Ness' actions? Do you agree with him?
46. Saice asks Ness to bring her the 'suturing tray' (p.114). What procedure is this medical equipment used for? How does Ness' medical expertise change through the novel?

### **Chapter Ten:**

47. Ness states that she has no energy for regrets (p.120). Make a list of what you think some of her regrets might be.
48. Esha taught Ness a technique to help her get to sleep (p.120). What does this technique entail? Which religions use meditation and/or visualisation as a religious practice?
49. Truso declares at a meeting that they all

feel marginalised (p.122). Why does he say this? Who do you believe could feel marginalised in our society and why? What steps are being/could be taken to remedy their feelings?

50. Ness and Jago's decision to stay at the farm is described as a 'double mutiny' (p.125). What does this mean? Do you think they made the right decision when they chose to stay?

### **Chapter Eleven:**

51. Ness wonders if the older children are suffering from shock (p.140). How does Saice check? What are the symptoms of shock and how do you treat them?
52. When Ness takes food to the prisoners she sees the state they are in following an interrogation (p.145–146). How does Ness feel about their treatment? Do you agree with her point of view? Investigate the human rights of prisoners of war. Which organisations have been set up to draw attention to this issue?

### **Chapter Twelve:**

53. Scout has damaged his scapula (p.157). What part of the body is this? Draw a diagram of a human skeleton.

### **Chapter Thirteen:**

54. Stefan's act of bravery saves the horses from the barn fire (p.157). There are many moments of bravery by community members in the novel. Which do you think is the greatest? Explain why.
55. Ness is confused as to why the para-military splinter group did not try to find a peaceful solution (p.166). Divide into two groups and imagine you are the members of the splinter group or the governors from Vidya, and negotiate a peaceful solution.

56. Ness wonders if Dunnett Island's Council was right to ban 'teck', or at the least, guns (p.169). What are the gun laws in New Zealand? Compared to other countries, for example the USA, do you think they should be stricter or more liberal? Why?
57. Brenon worries that volunteer soldiers carry a higher risk of casualties (p.170). What was the name of the volunteer soldiers protecting New Zealand in World War II? Find out if anyone in your area and/or family was one of these volunteers and what role they played.

#### Chapter Fourteen:

58. Ness knows that the suffering of Summertop's residents '...goes deeper than the scars that we see' (p.181). Research post-traumatic stress syndrome. What are the symptoms, the effect on sufferers and the treatment and support available? Find out if there is a support organisation based in New Zealand.
59. The children from Summertop were found hiding in an old cellar beneath the farm (p.182). Read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Write a novel and/or author study of this book.
60. The arrival of three prisoners, rather than any celebration, signals the end of the war (p.183). What signalled the end of World War II? How was the end of World War II celebrated in New Zealand and in other allied countries?
61. The events of this war took place over a period of three weeks (p.183). Create a timeline and summary of the events that take place in the novel. Find out which was the longest war in history? What caused it? How long did it last? How many casualties were there?
62. Ness is unhappy with the community's vote to support the death of the prisoners (pp.185–189). Do you agree/disagree with the community's decision and why/why not? Where is the death penalty still practised?
63. Farra claims that it is '...those who come after to judge...' which actions of the community were right or wrong (p.190). What do you think past generations have done wrong? Which actions in the present do you think could impact negatively on future generations? What legacy would you wish to pass on to future generations?

#### Chapter Seventeen:

64. Truso compiled a list of the wounded and killed (p.212). Find out how many people in your area died in World Wars I and II. How are they remembered?
65. Farra tells Ness that 'Good ends come out of the least likely things.' (p.222). Think of an example in your life and/or world history that supports this claim.
66. Divide into two teams and debate whether or not Ness' decision to return to Vidya was right (p.223).
67. Imagine that communications have opened up between the islands and the mainland. Write Ness' first letter from Vidya to her family on Dunnett Island about all that has happened to her.
68. Imagine that you are Brenan or Truso. Write a confidential report for the Vidya Deacons about the attack on Home Farm and the surrounding events.
69. Write a diary entry about one of the main events in the book by one of the following characters:
- Jago
  - Saice
  - Ronan
  - Devdan
  - Farra



70. Write a dramatic monologue from Saice's point of view, retelling the experiences she's had while working at Home Farm, including her role in Ness' life. Perform it for the class.
71. Rewrite one of the climactic scenes as a video script. (If your school has filming equipment, produce your scene.)
72. Do you think the novel could be made into a dramatic film or TV programme? Write a letter in support of the film for possible investors and design a poster advertising the movie/TV version of the novel. Think about which actors you would like to use to portray the book characters and why?
73. Design your own front cover and write your own version of the back cover blurb for the novel.
74. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine or newspaper.
75. Imagine that books can be divided into comedies or tragedies with comedy defined as a celebration of life, and tragedy as a recognition of our flaws and mortality. Which of the two modes would this book fit into most comfortably? Argue your case with examples from the book.