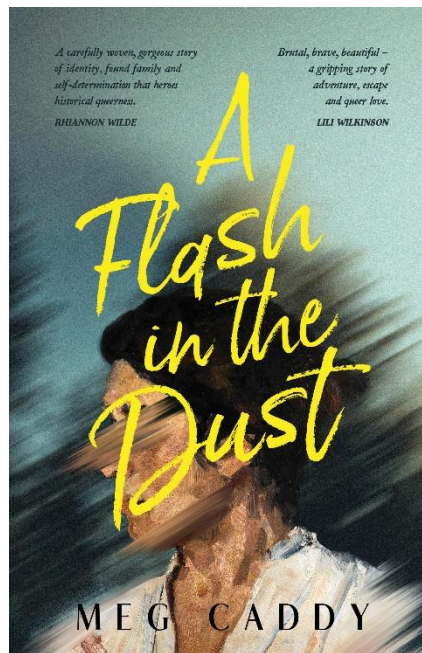


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A FLASH IN THE DUST

Meg Caddy



Teachers' Notes

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SYNOPSIS

When Norah witnesses the murder of her 'second mother' at the hands of the Whistling Man, no-one believes her claims. Instead, she is declared insane and banished to the Fremantle Asylum, filled with the outcasts of 1890s society. Desperate to escape and seek vengeance for this unspeakable crime, Norah elicits the help of the reclusive Gilberta Brady – soon known as Gil – an inmate of three years whose spirit and mettle have long since dissolved.

Now fugitives, Norah and Gil convince Malkar and Kedalak, two Nyungar brothers, to help them flee not only the authorities but the violent serial killer on the hunt for Norah. Before long, they resort to bushranging for their very survival. In a test of their courage, resilience and fortitude, Norah and Gil learn to accept who they are in a world that rejects almost everything about them.

A Flash in the Dust is an historical thriller that gives voice to two young queer people in an era when their very existence was forbidden – or, at best, ignored. In their struggle for acceptance, belonging and peace, Norah and Gil finally find themselves; theirs is a love that is poetry.

THEMES

- Identity
- Belonging
- Acceptance
- Love
- Relationships
- Perspective
- Courage
- Joy
- Nyungar Culture
- First Nations: Histories and Culture
- Bushrangers
- Justice
- Resilience
- LGBTQIA+

WRITING STYLE

Told using a variety of narrative voices, *A Flash in the Dust* provides a queer perspective on Australian history, a taboo subject in 1890s society.

Gilberta Brady (Gil) shares their experience as a nonbinary person vilified by their own family and locked away for 'moral insanity'. Filled with shame, Gil stifles their true self, craving acceptance and absolution. Norah, too, is queer. She has grown up with the working ladies of a bawdy house, her mother a night worker. After the death of her mother, trans woman Billie steps in as Norah's second mother and protector.

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In their plight, Gil and Norah convince Nyungar brothers Malkar and Kedalak, who have already saved them once already, to help them. Their cultural knowledge and skills prove critical to the group's survival. Through their inclusion, the many injustices inflicted upon First Nations peoples during this era are also integrated into the text.

It is later revealed that the Whistling Man, the terrifying, shady figure who murdered Billie, is a serial killer – a local policeman who abuses his own family and is bent on destroying lives and love that he doesn't understand.

A Flash in the Dust employs a complex combination of narrative styles to give an urgency to the story that is fast paced yet detailed and intricate. Haunting omniscient narrations of the actions of both the Whistling Man and his courageous young son William are interspersed with the distinct first-person voices of Gil and Norah, each providing an intense and sensitive insight into lives suffocated by social norms and values of the time. Flashbacks are also used to share Norah's memories of Billie and her murder.

A gripping and incredibly powerful story of love, identity and belonging, *A Flash in the Dust* uses this clever structure, exceptional writing and evocative figurative language to bring to life a compelling insight into the many forms that love takes.

Due to content that includes murder, domestic violence, the occasional use of explicit language and references to sex work, it is best suited to older audiences aged 14+.

STUDY NOTES**Cover and Content Note**

- Examine the cover of *A Flash in the Dust*. What are you wondering? Make predictions about the story. After reading the text, return to this discussion. How does it capture the themes and subject matter of this story?
- Read the Content Note at the start of text. Discuss the author's comment that 'queerness haunts the margins of our history books' (p. vii). What do they mean by this?

Prologue

- Discuss how mood and suspense are established in the Prologue. How are language features – especially imagery – used to create the arresting presence of the Whistling Man?

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Chapter 1

- The opening chapter places readers directly into the setting of the Fremantle Asylum. Describe this setting. Discuss the ‘nocturnal shiftings and shouts’ of the night that were ‘just the asylum’s lullaby’ (p. 7).
- We are told on p. 9 that ‘in Australia it didn’t matter how Irish or Catholic you were, so long as your father found gold’. What impact has this sentiment had on Brady’s life? How is *A Flash in the Dust* a story about class and the desperate struggle of many to climb the social ladder, no matter the costs?
- What does Brady mean when they say, ‘[t]ime was slippery in the asylum’ (p. 13)?

Chapter 2

- Norah says that ‘memories shook through me, made me feel almost as mad as they said I was. And I was angry. So angry’ (p. 15). How does her anger turn into fear?
- Norah makes the comment that she is being checked ‘like I was stock. *Cattle*’ (emphasis in original; p. 15). How does this reflect the dehumanisation of those banished to the asylum?

Chapter 3

- Why is Brady so afraid to leave the asylum? In a monologue, show your understanding of their fear but also their growing sense of identity and strength.
- Why are characters such as Maude and Beatrice included in the text? How do they contribute to the telling of this story?

Chapter 4

- Norah says that ‘back at the house, feuds and friendships were always shifting and I was usually somewhere close to the bottom of the pile’ (p. 34). How does meeting Brady change this?
- In what ways is Norah tough, resilient and resourceful? How is she vulnerable? Why is it important that readers see both sides of her character?

Chapter 5

- Among other things, the boy’s father tells him, ‘[y]ou won’t be a man until you know how to shoot’ (p. 42). What other traits of toxic masculinity does the boy’s father represent? Why are these included in *A Flash in the Dust*? How does the boy quietly reject his father as a role model and what does this tell us about his relationship to masculinity? Is it healthy or toxic?

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Chapter 6

- Why, when asked by Norah to help her escape, does Brady say, ‘the outside world was bleeding into my sanctuary, dragging with it all the choices and chaos that brought me here in the first place’ (p. 46)? Although feeling conflicted, why do they ultimately help Norah? What does this share about Brady’s character?
- Why is Brady so eager to have Norah out of their world? How and why does this attitude slowly change?

Chapter 7

- Norah describes Brady as sitting, ‘gathered-up and gangly, her elbows resting on her knees and her chin on her knuckles’ (pp. 48–49)? How do Norah’s perceptions of Brady change as she gets to know them properly?

Chapter 8

- Brady says, ‘the voice in my head sounded like my brother Geoffrey, and I wanted to listen’ (p. 52). In the voice of Brady, explain why you feel this way. How does this feeling change later in the text?

Chapter 9

- Norah comments that ‘being invisible’ was part of her job at the house (p. 54). Debate whether the skill of being invisible is a help or hindrance to her in this story.
- Analyse the language features used to tighten the tension during Brady and Norah’s escape in Chapter 9.
- In the voice of Norah, write a journal entry about your following observation of Brady:
‘When I searched her face, even in the dark, it didn’t look like she was even thinking. Just empty, just blank, just stone. Some of the other girls in the asylum had been broken or dull but I didn’t know what to do with this, with someone who’d been wiped so clean of thought and feeling’ (p. 58).

Chapter 10

- Norah wonders ‘if I’d done a really cruel thing by pulling [Brady] out into the real world’ (p. 59), also saying, ‘the bird was in love with the cage’ (p. 60). In the role of Norah or Brady, prepare and perform a monologue in response to this comment.
- Respond to Norah’s comment that: ‘I was strong-willed, and she didn’t have a spine to speak of ... Part of me wanted to shake her until she showed something like a spine, some fire, anything other than that sheep-eyed sadness. The other part of me, much smaller, wanted to sit

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down with her and gently pry a person out from the shell the asylum had put around her' (pp. 62–63).

Chapter 11

- What is Brady so afraid of about the outside world? Why do they crave 'schedules' (p. 69) and other parameters of the asylum? Of what, really, are they fearful?
- We find out on p. 70 that Brady was incarcerated for 'moral insanity'. They later share their diagnosis of 'morbid sensuality' (p. 82). How does this reveal the harsh realities and values of nineteenth-century Australia? Write an editorial about this era in which so many people had no identity or voice.
- What does Brady mean when they say of Norah, 'I also knew better than to confuse education with intelligence. She was sharp enough' (p. 71)?
- In a reflection, share your feelings when Brady shares that 'My brother had me committed ... I was becoming a strain on the household peace. It was for the best' (p. 71).
- Brady comes from a 'poor Irish family' (p. 73) that had found wealth on the gold fields of Western Australia. How might Brady's life had been different had their father never found gold? How is this novel one about class? Give reasons to support your ideas.

Chapter 13

- Discuss the language features used in the following passage to depict this setting so vividly:
 'The grass around the shed came up pale and long, and whipped against the walls when the wind came up. The trees crowded it, their branches draped like skeletal hands over the wood. They ticked and clicked in each breeze, running along the tin roof like a miser fingering his coins until they were grubby with his prints.' (p. 90)
- When the boy slaps his palm against his father's shed, a splinter bites 'into the flesh at the corner of his nail, like a rebuke' (p. 90). How does this foreshadow what's to come?
- At what point do readers come to understand the connection between the boy's father and the Whistling Man? How has the author achieved this suspense and tension?

Chapter 14

- Why do you think Malkar and Kedalak help Brady and Norah? How would this story be different without them in it? How does their inclusion help readers better understand the discrimination and injustices that were rife during this era of Australian history?

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- Why does Brady describe Norah as having ‘real charm’ (p. 99)? How has the author achieved this charm in creating Norah’s character?
- Discuss whether you agree with Brady that ‘Norah was a bushfire ... and there was no way to extinguish her’ (p102). Is this a compliment or insult?
- Brady is ‘afraid of what ... people might say’ (p. 104). In a reflection, share when you too have felt concerned about the opinions of others. How is *A Flash in the Dust* a story about courage and hope in the face of fear and judgement?

Chapter 16

- Why is Giacomo needed in this story? How does he serve as a father figure?

Chapter 17

- How does the change of chapter headings from *Brady* to *Gil* signal their growing sense of identity and growth as a character?
- Gil wonders at Norah’s ability to ‘dismiss corrections and rejections and criticism’ (p. 124). How does this help Gil to find their own courage and strength?
- What is the importance of the following scene in *A Flash in the Dust*?
 ‘That was kind of the landowners, to teach you. To let you hunt on their land.’
 The smile faded. Malkar pulled his hand back. ‘Our land. Bastards only think it’s theirs.’
 Bricks of silence stacked between us. His disdain washed over me. (p. 125)

Chapter 18

- How is the family violence depicted in *A Flash in the Dust* a necessary part of this story?
- Explain the analogy of the boy and his father being David and Goliath (see p. 130).
- How is the notion that ‘when a beast is defective, you end its misery’ (p. 131) used in *A Flash in the Dust*?

Chapter 19

- Norah says of Gil, ‘quick as her mind was, her tongue tended to stumble along behind’ (p. 137). Have you ever felt like Gil in this regard? Share in a reflection.

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Chapter 20

- How does Gil feel upon discovering the Whistling Man is a policeman? Why do they say, 'that changed things in a way I could not define' (p. 150)?
- How is Norah breaking her arm an essential plot point in *A Flash in the Dust*?

Chapter 22

- Gil says, 'my malady was a rare one, but there were others who had suffered the same delusions, the same disordered thinking' (p. 162). How does the precise use of vocabulary such as *malady*, *delusions* and *disordered thinking* emphasise how those from the queer community were mistreated during this time?
- Gil is concerned that Norah sees 'too much, that pin-like gaze' eroding away their defence mechanisms (p. 163). Does this help or hinder Gil? Justify your thinking using evidence from the text.
- Gil comments, 'I could not remember anyone ever just wanting my company before' (p. 163). How does this help readers relate to their character even more so?

Chapter 23

- What does Norah mean when she says Gil 'seemed plucked out of a fairytale at times' (p. 165)?
- What is it about Malkar that Norah most respects? Why are the relationships of the Brady Gang so important in this story?

Chapter 25

- In the role of Gil, write and perform a monologue based on the following moment in *A Flash in the Dust*: 'I wanted to ask her so many things. I wanted to *tell* her things' (p. 184).
- When Gil explains 'I cannot fit, cannot *make* myself fit. I am a little bit of nothing' (p. 187), Norah shows acceptance and understanding by saying, 'sometimes your outsides don't match your insides ... but there ain't words for what you are' (p. 188). Discuss the difference between now and then for those in the LGBTIQA+ community. What has changed? What still needs to be done to achieve equity?
- Why does Norah like the pronoun *they* for Gil? How does Gil respond to this (see p. 189)? Why, after their conversation, does Gil say, 'I sat with her for some time, feeling empty and tired and clean, honest in the eyes of God for the first time in many years' (p. 189)? How does Walt Whitman's line from 'Song of Myself', 'I am large, I contain multitudes,' reflect the themes of *A Flash in the Dust*? In the voice of Gil, write a reflection about this part of the story.

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- Gil experiences immense shame at the hands of their brother Geoffrey. How do they overcome this shame (see p. 192)?
- Discuss Gil's promise to return to the asylum should Geoffrey 'not send anyone after [Norah]' (p. 193). How does this sacrifice show the depth of their connection with Norah?

Chapter 26

- Reread the first paragraph of Chapter 26. In the role of Norah, explain why 'talking like that left me tired in a way I'd never been. It was like the clean feeling after a good cry, but there was a warmth to it too. I slept, then, better than I had since I could remember' (p. 195).
- Why does Norah describe Beatrice as 'all corners and bitterness' (p. 197)?
- Discuss why does Norah feels she has 'let Billie down. Again' (p. 200)?

Chapter 27

- What does Norah mean when she says, 'I made myself think of Gil. Nervous, cautious, gentle Gil. I hoped they knew ...' (p. 208)?

Chapter 28

- What does Gil mean when they say, 'I had always been [Geoffrey's] strange mirror' (p. 210)?
- Reenact the scene in the coach in which Gil finally stands up for themselves to Geoffrey (see p. 211). Why does Gil say, 'his words were harsh, but their serration came from uncertainty, not malice or cruelty. I had a tongue and mind of my own' (p. 211)? How did you feel when reading this passage?
- Gil remarks 'Geoffrey was a weak man' (p. 212), for whom they felt sorry, wanting to 'wrap him in a tight hug' (p. 213). Instead, they 'opened the door of the coach, stepped out into the shadowy afternoon ... I should have felt guilty. I didn't' (pp. 213-214). How does this provide a trigger in the narrative that leads to the story's climax and resolution?

Chapter 30

- Kedalak is a quiet character with enormous impact in the story. Discuss his traits and justify his presence in *A Flash in the Dust*.
- How is imagery used in the following excerpt to build tension and suspense?
 - 'Enormous jarrah trees rose around us, looking like strange iron bars' (p. 223).
- Create a character portrait of Billie. How does her murder provide the cohesive tie for the events of *A Flash in the Dust*?

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Chapter 31

- Why, when Gil realises they are in love with Norah, do they say, 'Relief swept through me' (p. 229)? Why did it take Malkar's observation of this for Gil to recognise it as love?
- When they reach the dam, Gil describes it as follows:
'As soon as I saw the scar in the land I knew we were there, on the precipice of this human madness and ingenuity. It was monstrous and marvellous all at once, black ribbons of scaffolding rising up on either side of the hewn stone and across the temporary wall that blocked the path of the river' (p. 232).
- Why, when Gil then looks at Malkar, do they see 'a heavy, tired sadness' (p. 232)?

Chapter 33

- Gil says that the Whistling Man 'wouldn't expect anything from me. No-one ever did. Good' (p. 241)? How does this change by the end of the novel?
- Respond to the following excerpt in a medium of your choice: "What are you?" he asked ... "I contain multitudes," I rasped. "You couldn't understand if you tried" (p. 243).

Chapter 34

- In the role of William, write a journal entry about realising that 'the monster was naked now. No mask. No shed to hide in' (see pp. 244–245). What is going through your mind at this time?

Chapter 35

- When Norah's arm is amputated, explain why she says, 'the darkness always wrapped me up again, pulled me away from those moments. It had the arms of both my mothers' (p. 253).

Chapter 38

- How is the relationship between Gil and Norah 'poetry' (p. 263)?

Chapter 39

- Why, when returning to the shed, does William say, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' but 'not say any words for his father' (p. 265)?

General Learning Activities

- Choose a chapter from *A Flash in the Dust* on which to write a play script. Perform this play, complete with appropriate costumes and props.
- Write one of the chapters narrated by Brady/Gil or Norah to write from the other's point of view.

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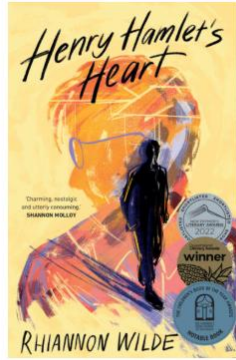
- Create a Character Timeline showing the character development of Brady/Gil and Norah. When does Brady become Gil? What prompts this change?
- Many injustices are included in *A Flash in the Dust*, propelled by power imbalances and bigotry. Choose one such injustice on which to write a feature article, using research and case studies, as well as examples from the text, to support your arguments.
- In what ways is *A Flash in the Dust* a story about loneliness?
- How do Gil and Norah help one another? Share in a reflection, giving examples from the text to support your thinking.
- Compare chapters written by Gil and Norah. Analyse their different voices and character traits. How have language features been used to achieve these different voices? Use excerpts from the text to support your ideas.
- In the Author's Note, Meg Caddy writes: 'Fremantle Asylum was a real place, and the conditions described there are taken from numerous nineteenth-century newspapers' (p. 274). Research more about this asylum and these accounts.
- Discuss the use of flashbacks to reveal various characters' vulnerabilities and hopes. Record these on a graphic organiser.
- In pairs, produce a podcast that discusses how the main themes in *A Flash in the Dust* have changed between 1899 and the present. What still needs further progress? Use evidence and reasoning to support your views.
- Return to the image on the front cover of *A Flash in the Dust*. Who, in the main, is this story about? Why do you think this?
- Create a Story Map that traces the story arc of *A Flash in the Dust*. Annotate this map to show its narrative structure.
- How are the attitudes and violence towards First Nations peoples during the nineteenth century exemplified in *A Flash in the Dust*? Why is this an essential part of this story?
- In what ways was the nineteenth century a brutal time?
- How is abject poverty an underlying theme in *A Flash in the Dust*?
- Using evidence from the text to support your arguments, discuss the following statement: 'The mothers in *A Flash in the Dust* have no voice'.
- Conduct a character interview with a character of your choice from *A Flash in the Dust*, asking questions in the role of a journalist before answering these questions in the role of your chosen character.
- Summarise *A Flash in the Dust* in six words (a six-word summary).
- Select a passage from *A Flash in the Dust* to analyse, showing how language features have been used to create mood, tension and voice.

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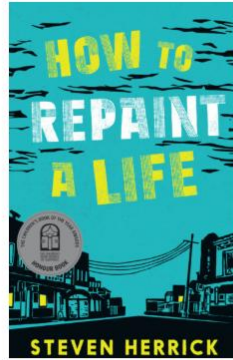
- Time permitting, compare *A Flash in the Dust* with one of the texts below:



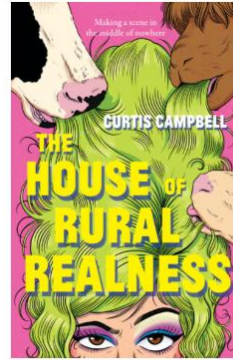
Only This Beautiful Moment
Abdi Nazemian



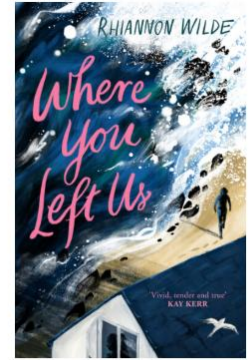
Henry Hamlet's Heart
Rhiannon Wilde



How to Repaint a Life
Steven Herrick



The House of Rural Realness
Curtis Campbell



Where You Left Us
Rhiannon Wilde

- Discuss the contribution of figurative language in *A Flash in the Dust*.
Examples include:

- Birds had scattered with the first shot and they were still unsettled, wheeling through the air with the occasional keening cry (p. 1)
- Fury and grief ripped through the girl (p. 2)
- A voice floated down the hill (p. 3)
- The day dawned warm and thick (p. 7)
- The doctor had steel in his soul (p. 10)
- A sick coil of worry tightened in my stomach (p. 12)
- His eyes pinned me in place (p. 12)
- Heat crept along my neck and into my cheeks (p. 12)
- Her brown eyes were empty, and she had faint freckles that were melting back into the white of her skin from lack of sunlight (p. 17)
- Questions that made angry, shamed blood beat in my ears (p. 18)
- An English accent, rough, like it'd been scraped across limestone (p. 19)
- Truth was like soap in here; the harder you held it the more likely it was to slip from your grip (p. 31)
- The younger ones stuck to her like flies on jam (p. 34)
- The two middle brothers hovered behind him like flower flies, excitement fluttering between them (p. 40)
- My Judas kiss was done, and I would have nothing more to do with it – or with Norah Devaney (p. 47)
- The night's entertainment swam past me (p. 51)
- The river ... stretched out in front of us, dark and hungry, quiet for now (p. 56)
- She gathered her long limbs up, crow-like, and huddled in the sand (p. 59)
- The rail station sat along the south side of the Swan River, a jumble of dark sheds and rattling metal carriages (p. 62)

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- It was stuffy inside the metal shed, like being in an oven (p. 63)
- Minutes later the train started off, slow as a sunny day (p. 67)
- I hobbled like an old woman, my breath sharp and catching in my throat (p. 75)
- The thought of drowning plagued me sometimes, got into me like salt water (p. 78)
- Night dropped over us (p. 79)
- I listened to her breathing, to the trees above us, to the thin whine of mosquitoes and the heavy flutter of moth wings (p. 82)
- A golden orb spider lazily swung about its web, threading out a pretty pattern (p. 83)
- My breath was hard and knotted in my chest. Barefoot, the sharp grass and bushes tore at our feet and shins, catching on our dresses and threatening to snare us like two flies in a living web (p. 86–87)
- My teeth clacked together (p. 87)
- But she didn't say a word. Just curled up like a poked worm (p. 88)
- Watching the trees move in the faint breeze (p. 89)
- The boy could tolerate her foul breath in exchange for the rough warmth of her sun-rusted coat (p. 89)
- The boy felt the fishhook of curiosity catch in his mouth every time he saw his father go down to the shed (p. 90)
- More questions burbled behind the boy's lips, but he didn't let them spill (p. 92)
- The panic of the scene slid away, like painted colours under a rush of cool water (p. 95)
- She had her own force, it seemed to me, a pull that was as sure as gravity (p. 99)
- Norah was a bushfire once she had a notion, and there was no way to extinguish her (p. 102)
- I found the words drying in my mouth (p. 106)
- The gelding shifted beneath us, mutinous (p. 114)
- The next night was one of gin and fists, dark noises through thin walls (p. 115)
- The sky was heavy, laden with rain (p. 116)
- His face, brown and wrinkled as an old apple, creased until his brown eyes were lost (p. 118)
- I felt my shoulders draw in and my heart beat a hot flush into my cheeks (p. 122)
- Horror swelled in my stomach (p. 122)
- Bricks of silence stacked between us. His disdain washed over me (p. 126)

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- Heat crept into my cheeks (p. 126)
- I could almost hear my father's rich, warm voice telling me the story (p. 128)
- The boy's heart came to the front of his rib cage, started to battle with his bones, too loud for him to hear anything else (p. 130)
- I swam out of the strange half-sleep, holding onto the memory for a crumpled moment before it was gone (p. 136)
- The memory burnt clear in my mind (p. 139)
- The words slipped out and when they did, it was a relief, such a relief to say them out loud instead of carrying them under my ribs (p. 139)
- After a moment her hand snaked out and touched mine, a quick double-pat. Gentle as a breath (p. 139)
- The sun trickled through the trees, sometimes disappearing when the clouds stole in front of them (p. 141)
- Hitting the ground with a dull splash of mud and an ugly crunch of bone (p. 144)
- Then, awfully, the hollow *thock* of a hoof hitting her head (p. 144)
- Another gunshot cracked. The bullet spun through the air and splintered through a tree (p. 148)
- The world stretched out around us like a rumpled blanket, endless green curves and coils (p. 153)
- The wind was cold in that deep way that blew right through the bone (p. 159)
- The wind was picking up, driving rain in sheets across the water. The trees above us swayed and creaked, occasionally dropping gumnuts in showers that startled and stung (p. 167)
- It was dark inside the house. Aroma competed with stench: alcohol and perfume and sweat (p. 174)
- My hands were clammy, my stomach tight and twisted (p. 180)
- My thoughts unspooled (p. 191)
- Shame shivered through me (p. 192)
- I felt the lack hard, as if I'd been by a fire on a cold day and now I was just left with the wind (p. 195)
- Noise started to leak in from the house, familiar and odd all at once, like a song played off-key (p. 196)
- ... pain clobbered my head from both sides ... my head ached from behind my eyes through to the base of my skull, surged down through my neck (p. 199)
- Trees bent over it like mourners at a funeral (p. 201)
- The shame of that burrowed into my skin and feasted like a leech (p. 204)

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- Suddenly, snake-quick, he grabbed the front of my stool and dragged it closer to him ... p. 206)
- Geoffrey's words fell like bricks into thick mud (p. 212)
- He checked on his mother, curled up with her feet on the chair and her stringy brown hair drooping over her face (p. 217)
- His knees were liquid (p. 218)
- White foam gurgled and spat into the ravine below (p. 242)
- The whisper-thin dirt tracks widened into a pebbly road ... (p. 251)
- Stayed there for hours, thoughts rattling around (p. 256)
- Memories came to me in broken pieces (p. 259)
- I follow the pale threads of light home (p. 269)
- Sometimes I still wake up with the lullaby of the asylum clattering though my head (p. 270)

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I always felt as though Australian history had very little to do with me. Both primary school and high school history classes focused on straight white men, and by university I was desperate for representation that included people like me. At the same time, I was struggling with how exactly to define 'people like me'. Growing up in Western Australia in the nineties and the noughties, I rarely saw queer identities reflected in the books I read, the movies I watched or the histories I was taught at school. For the longest time, I didn't have the language to express how I felt and who I was. It was lonely.

Australian adult historical fiction is starting to broaden its scope to include queer experiences, but there is still a glaring gap in the young adult historical space. When I had the opportunity to do a creative writing PhD about YA historical fiction, I felt it was my best chance to finally find the language I didn't have when I was an anxious teenager. *A Flash in the Dust* is the end result of that PhD. It is a story about bushranging and revenge. It is a story about lonely queer teenagers finding one another in a hostile world. Finally, it is a story about knowing who you are – even if you don't have the words for it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meg Caddy is a West Australian YA novelist with three published novels. Their first three novels, *Waer*, *Devil's Ballast* and *Slipping the Noose*, have been short- and longlisted for awards including the CBCA Book of the Year Award, the Readings Young Adult Book Prize and the ARA Historical Novel Prize. Meg is nonbinary and asexual. They have completed an Honours degree in English/History, writing on the Golden Age of Piracy, and a PhD in Creative Writing. When they're not writing, elbows-deep in archives or chasing around their toddler, Meg plays an unhealthy amount of Dungeons & Dragons.