

ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

A heart-breaking, heart-lifting, effortlessly enjoyable story about love and grief and everything in between.

'Engaging and luminous' -Rosalie Ham, author of *The Dressmaker*

'... engrossing and compassionate' -Paddy O'Reilly, author of *The Wonders*

'... tender and surprising' -Kalinda Ashton, author of *The Danger Game*

Joe lives-despite himself. Driven by the need to atone for the neglect of a single tragic summer's night, he works at nothing jobs and, in his spare time, trains his body and mind to conquer the hostile environment that took his love and smashed up his future. So when a breathless girl turns up on the doorstep, why does he let her in? Isn't he done with love and hope?

On the other side of the city, graphic designer Elise is watching her marriage bleed out. She retreats to the only place that holds any meaning for her-the tiger enclosure at the zoo-where, for reasons she barely understands, she starts to sketch the beautiful killers.

Leap is a beautiful urban fairytale about human and animal nature, and the transformative power of grief. While at its heart is a searing absence, this haunting and addictive novel is propelled by an exhilarating life force, and the eternally hopeful promise of redemptive love.

'... a writer who knows how to draw us in by portraying what it is to love and lose in a real sense.' -Georgia Blain, author of *The Secret Lives of Men*

About the author

Myfanwy Jones is the author of *The Rainy Season*, shortlisted for The Melbourne Prize for Literature's Best Writing Award 2009, and co-author of the bestselling *Parlour Games for Modern Families*, Book of the Year for Older Children ABIA 2010. She lives by a creek in Melbourne with her human and non-human family.

Author, Myfanwy Jones, on writing *Leap*

Leap came out fast and fully formed after a three-year writing drought. Part of the block had been about turning forty and grieving for dead friends who will never meet that milestone. I broke the drought - by travelling alone to Saigon for a few weeks during the rainy season in mid-2013. I booked into a cheap hotel room and got so lonely that the story finally came. I wrote 10,000 words in that room and finished the first draft in a cell at the Old Melbourne Gaol. Between drafts I spent a few months visiting the tigers at the zoo with my knitting – best research ever! I also met up with a traceur who helped with the parkour thread and picked other generous brains on matters of nursing, cabbage rolls and the captive behaviour of big cats.

The second draft came very quickly, again, in a dusty room at the rear of a local community hall, and was finished back in Saigon - this time at a friend's apartment. For a story about grief it has been remarkably easy, even joyful, to write. Perhaps it's all that time with the tigers but I keep comparing the process to coughing up a giant fur-ball – strenuous yet requiring little conscious effort; I realise, now, that *Leap* was taking shape in those years without words.

For discussion

- ☞ *Leap* is a character-driven novel about grief. Examine Joe and Elise's contrasting experiences with grief in the narrative. What do their diverse experiences illustrate about the process of grieving?
- ☞ "L'art du deplacement could be summarised in three words: running – climbing – jumping." *Leap* is divided into three parts – running, climbing, jumping. Why has the author chosen these verbs? What commentary on mourning do these words describe?
- ☞ Both Joe and Elise find respite from their grief in physical acts - Elise in secretly sketching the tigers, Joe through sex and his gruelling practice of parkour. Discuss the novel's preoccupation with the physical act of grieving and the impact that grief has on the human body.
- ☞ Explore Elise's fascination with the tigers at the zoo. What do they represent to her? Are they a symbol of freedom and endurance, or of captivity and torment?
- ☞ "Exile is a state. It can be self-imposed or imposed by others." (p. 162) Consider Joe's relationship with Lena. How does she help him overcome his guilt?
- ☞ "He hates that she is still here in this pseudo world, only static." (p.60) Examine Joe's conversations with the mysterious 'Emily Dickinson' in *Leap*. How is Facebook used as a tool for overcoming grief in the novel? Does Facebook help or hinder Joe's attempts to reconcile his guilt and loss?
- ☞ "He wants to be rid of her. He wants to never let go." (p. 162) Who is the unnamed nightshift nurse? What does she represent in the narrative?
- ☞ "So he tries to explain it to her; l'art du deplacement. About the beauty and precision, the fear and the implausibility. About moving forwards and overcoming with grace." (p. 316) Does Joe's practice of parkour help him overcome his grief, or is it a tool he uses to further punish himself for Jennifer's death?
- ☞ "He has changed these past months as he has come undone. So has she. For the first time since Jennifer's death they can see one another." (p.301) Discuss the impact of Jennifer's death on Elise and Adam's marriage.
- ☞ The process of grieving in *Leap* is explained through movement and stillness. Discuss how grief is presented in the novel – is it a force for transformation?



“And maybe no trick he pulls off is ever going to bring her back but this one – it’s for her. He is going to make a perfect landing. Breathes: One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Leaps.” (p.324) The process of grieving in *Leap* is explained through movement and stillness. Discuss how grief is presented in the novel – is it a force for transformation?

Suggested further reading

Other Works by the Author

The Rainy Season, Myfanwy Jones (Penguin, 2009)

Parlour Games for Modern Families, Myfanwy Jones and Spiri Tsintziras (Scribe, 2009)

Fiction

Life of Pi by Yann Martel

The Time Traveller's Wife by Audrey Niffenegger

One Day by David Nicholls

The Children by Charlotte Wood

Animal People by Charlotte Wood

The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold

The Household Guide to Dying by Debra Adelaide

Death of a River Guide by Richard Flanagan

A Complicated Kindness by Miriam Toews

Safety by Tegan Bennett-Daylight

The Rose Grower by Michelle de Kretser

Springtime by Michelle de Kretser

Non-Fiction

H is for Hawk by Helen McDonald

A Grief Observed by CS Lewis

My Mother, My Father, edited by Susan Wyndham

The Young Widow's Guide to Home Improvement by Virginia Lloyd

Suggested Viewing

Beginners, dir. Mike Mills (2010)

The Broken Circle Breakdown, dir. Felix Van Groeningen (2012)

The Descendants, dir. Alexander Payne (2011)

Ordinary People, dir. Robert Redford (1980)