

# LOOK ME *in the* EYE



JANE GODWIN

**TEACHERS RESOURCES**

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Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Introduction	3
Before & After Reading the Novel	3
Themes & Curriculum Topics	3
Humanities & Social Sciences (HASS)	
English Language & Literacy	
<i>Narrative Person &amp; Tense</i>	
<i>Literary Devices</i>	
<i>Structure</i>	
<i>Characters</i>	
<i>Writing Tasks</i>	
Visual Literacy	
Further Quotes for Discussion	10
Further Activities	11
Conclusion	11
About the Author	11
Worksheets	12
Bibliography	14
About the Author of the Notes	15

# INTRODUCTION

'It still feels strange to be allowed out. I'm nervous, as if someone's going to tap me on the shoulder, tell me to put my mask on, to go home, stay inside.' (p 1)

*The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.*  
Ernest Hemingway

Once trust is gone, what is there to hold onto? From award-winning author Jane Godwin, a thought-provoking novel about young teens navigating friendship and trust in a post-pandemic world of surveillance and control.

## Running late drop it off without me

I type **Drop what off?** I don't know what Mish is talking about.  
While I'm typing, another message appears. **Don't tell Bella**  
But I am Bella.

Best friends Bella and Connie live on the outskirts of the city in an area that was once full of open fields and paddocks but is changing as the suburbs creep closer. And now there is Mish, Connie's cousin, who has to be included even though she is unfriendly and unpredictable. The pandemic lockdowns have lifted and the three teens are eager to explore their newfound independence. But with the world opening up, there has been a rise in surveillance, from apps that track their movements to voice recorders and hidden cameras. It feels like everyone is watching them. But when does 'watching' become 'watching over'?

Do we have a right to know everything about those we love? *Look Me in the Eye* is a dramatic and compelling story about freedom and control, privacy and secrecy, and the challenges we face in a post-Covid world.

# BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the cover of this novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?
- After you have read the novel, read about the author or the novel in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

# THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Humanities & Social Sciences, English Language & Literacy, and Visual Literacy) are evident in this novel.

## HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>>

## SURVEILLANCE

*Key Quote:* 'Behind Connie is a poster of eyes. It's a thing; posters of faces and eyes make

people behave better in public. They won't litter or steal things. We did it in SOSE this year. It's called The Hawthorne Effect. If people imagine they're being watched, they won't say or do anything that might attract attention.' (p 5)

*Discussion Point:* How much do people your age have a right to privacy? Is privacy important to you?

*Discussion Point:* 'Mish's dad thinks if he's watching her then she's safe.' 'So if he's not watching her, she's unsafe?' asks Pete. 'Then how's she going to grow up and survive in the world?' He pours more water from the jug. 'Does she put herself in risky situations?' (p 126) Do you think parents have a right to monitor their children? To what extent do your parents monitor you? Compare Mark's suspicious attitude to Mish, to Cara and Pete's trust in Bella.

*Discussion Point:* Observe the world around you and what forms of surveillance are prevalent. Bella and Cara go to Baby Mart and discover a wide range of baby monitors on sale. Many homes have security and most shopping areas do as well. Mark takes this to an extreme in monitoring his daughter and voice recording her movements. Bella notices how many cameras there are in Baby Mart: 'I've become someone who is watching for being watched.' (p 156) How do you feel about this constant surveillance? Does it make you feel uncomfortable?

*Discussion Point:* Mark's suspicions actually put Mish at more risk, as Connie says: 'She could be anywhere, with anyone, and he'll never know. All his surveillance, and he didn't really protect her.' (p 232) Is surveillance useful or is it dangerous, in your opinion? Would you feel safer knowing that your parents always know where you are? How would it make you feel? Would it change your behaviour in any way?

*Discussion Point:* Research the use of surveillance in our society. [See Bibliography.]

## TRUST

*Key Quote:* 'And I'm thinking that part of being a friend is letting them know those things about you that if they wanted to, they *could* use to hurt you. But you have to trust that they won't.' (p 80)

*Discussion Point:* Have you ever been in a situation where a family member or friend hasn't been honest with you? How did it affect your relationship? Did you lose trust in them?

*Discussion Point:* Pete and Cara trust Bella until she disappoints them by lying. But they choose to continue trusting her. 'And it strikes me that when Mum tells me she's going to work, or Pete says that he doesn't have any children, or Connie tells me she can't come over because June is sick, I believe them. But how would it be if I didn't? Mish's life must be like that. Once someone can't be trusted, there's nothing to hold on to anymore. Everything kind of falls away. If we don't have trust, what do we have?' (p 161) Discuss the notion of maintaining trust in someone. Do you think your parents trust you?

## POST-PANDEMIC SOCIETY

*Key Quote:* 'I wonder if we're all different people now. I definitely think about the world differently. I don't count on anything actually happening. Mum and Pete seem quite happy. They don't go out much these days. Maybe this is just our lives now. We're in a different time and place.' (p 14)

*Discussion Point:* Has the Covid pandemic made you less likely to enjoy a social life, or has it made you determined to enjoy your social life more?

*Discussion Point:* One of the things people recall about living through Covid was that people



returned to doing simple things at home such as baking, craft, enjoying their gardens and renovating. They learned to live 'slowly'. Bella reflects on a day with Connie: 'And I'm thinking if it wasn't for lockdown, we mightn't have thought to do this, have this day of making things. We got used to doing craft at home when we couldn't go anywhere.' (p 56) Discuss with students whether Covid changed what they choose to do in their leisure time. Do they have new hobbies and have they abandoned old ones?

*Discussion Point:* Bella observes that Covid was bad for some people's businesses and good for others. (p 48) What did you observe in the people closest to you? Did their livelihoods suffer?

## SOCIAL MEDIA

*Key Quote:* 'I s'pose,' says Mish. She looks so sad, and kind of small and fragile, a bit like June. For someone who is sneaky, Mish is also pretty gullible. But now I wonder if even she believed that Kye would look after her. Or did she just want to believe that. Because then Mish says quietly, 'He told me his name was Kye but I don't know if it was.' Poor Mish. I wonder if that guy is even the same one she was talking with online. How would she know? Anyway, now she has no one. Except Connie. And me.' (p 207)

*Discussion Point:* This novel reveals that mobile phones and texting can often prove quite dangerous for people. Mish communicates with a young man she's never met and then finds he has disappeared from social media platforms after stealing Pete's valuable card. What protective strategies should you employ when using social media?

*Discussion Point:* Did you or people in your family spend more time on social media during the pandemic? How did that affect your use of social media after the pandemic?

## FRIENDSHIP, BULLYING AND PEER PRESSURE

*Key Quote:* 'We walk on in silence. There's this new part of Connie that I've only seen since Mish moved here. Connie was never someone who let the mean girls get to her. But I suppose we're in high school now, and everything's changed.' (p 79)

*Discussion Point:* The novel is not only about the influence Mish has on Bella and Connie but about the environment of this first year at secondary school where friendship groups shift and where behaviours are scrutinised by peers and often criticised. It reveals how some kids react by abandoning their real interests, as Max does with his circus skills (p 115) in order to 'fit in' and to prevent themselves becoming targets for bullying. Discuss with students how they found the transition from primary to secondary school, and how they negotiated that.

*Discussion Point:* Discuss the strategies one can use when confronted by bullying. Connie and Bella are bullied by Mish into taking her phone and her texts in order to trick her father. How might Connie and Bella have reacted differently when asked by Mish to hold her phone for her?

*Discussion Point:* By the end of the novel Bella and Connie have come to understand Mish's problems, to feel sorry for her, and to wish to be her friend. Mish leaves Bella a touching gift for her new room, as well. Have you ever found yourself re-assessing a person and discovering that they have qualities you didn't first perceive?

## MORALS

*Key Quote:* I know it's bad to steal from anywhere, but to steal from someone who's not much older than us, who has spent her weekends making these things, and Mish doesn't even like it?

(p 74)

*Discussion Point:* Mish has no qualms about shoplifting and leads Bella and Connie into some dangerous situations. Discuss with students the fact that shoplifting is illegal, and also the morals involved in stealing from others.

*Discussion Point:* Why does Mish steal? She clearly doesn't want some of the things she takes.

## SUSTAINABILITY

*Key Quote:* 'Neither Pete nor Mum like to buy anything new. That's because Mum is in the de-growth movement.' (p 23)

*Discussion Point:* Living sustainably is one of the themes in this novel; for example, growing your own vegetables, making your own clothes, buying second-hand furniture instead of new, eating organic food. Discuss these and other examples either from this novel, or practices you've observed people in your own life demonstrating.

## LAND SUBDIVISION AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

*Key Quote:* 'Her estate looks grand from the road. Summerhill Rise has a wide, curving entrance with the tall trees and fancy light posts. But the light posts stop a few metres in, and then the roads narrow, and there are no footpaths. The houses are all up against each other, with the wide paddocks behind them. Overgrown grass moves with the wind. It's not green anymore. I think it's dead.' (p 96)

*Discussion Point:* This novel is partly a lament for the encroachment on countryside by new housing developments that destroy both flora and fauna. It suggests that these new homes aren't designed for practicality, but are simply designed to look appealing. Discuss the pros and cons of housing developments.

## PARENTING

*Key Quote:* 'I feel a bit jealous of this baby because it's not an accident; Pete and Mum tried for a year before they got pregnant. This baby is wanted. It will have a mum and a dad and it will know who they are. This baby will know its provenance.' (p 82)

*Discussion Point:* 'Living with Mum and Pete is a bit different from other families I've seen with a kid and their parents. They give me a lot of freedom and expect me to be responsible. Mum certainly doesn't track me – she hardly ever uses her phone. Her new year's resolution was to get rid of all technology. It was a bit extreme, and she's backtracked now because her friends, her work, everyone was getting frustrated because it was too hard to contact her when she took the sim card out of her phone.' (p 85) What did you think of Cara and Pete's parenting skills? Or of Anna and Seb's? Compare to Mark and Renata's approach.

*Discussion Point:* 'That documentary we watched about Anne Frank, when her dad Otto read her diary after she had died, he said he never knew half the things she was thinking about, even though he thought he knew her well. Like they spent two years in a small attic together. It made him believe that parents never really know their children completely. Does anyone really know anyone else? It's a scary thought.' (p 137) Discuss.

*Discussion Point:* Do parents have a right to know everything about their children? When does being a caring and responsible parent morph into surveillance?

## COLLECTING

*Key Quote:* 'Money is such an odd thing. Pete says the value of a vintage toy is simply what people are prepared to pay for it. Even if you can't use it, wear it, or do anything with it. All you can do is hold it, like a memory of when you were small. Or something.' (p 181)

*Discussion Point:* Pete's work is buying and selling collectable toys. What did you discover about collecting in reading this novel?

*Discussion Point:* What do your students collect? Discuss the things which they consider precious.

*Discussion Point:* 'Pete told me there were two main yo-yo crazes – in the 1970s and the 1990s. I think about the crazes we've had in our era.' (p 96) What are the current crazes at your school?

## POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

*Key Quote:* 'I don't know,' says Connie. 'Mum says he was different before he went to the war in Afghanistan. He wasn't so angry. Ren told Mum that fighting in that war took part of him away.' She blinks, slowly, her curved dark eyelashes falling against her face. 'Poor Uncle Mark.' (p 234)

*Discussion Point:* Despite being such an unlikable character who spies on his daughter and bullies his wife, the novel reveals that Mark is probably suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of his service in armed conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Did you have sympathy for him once you realised that?

*Discussion Point:* 'And now I feel like we have our own connection to Mish's family because Mark knows who Pete's dad was, and they were both part of a war I don't understand.' (p 231) Discuss the impact of war.

## MATURITY

*Key Quote:* 'I can't answer that question. I go to the sink and pour us both a glass of water. I look through the window to Mum's garden, and I wonder if we're all part Cabbage Patch, part Garbage Pail. Even Connie – good, sweet Connie – lied. Even I stole that earring. Maybe everyone has some secrets that are theirs alone. I might never understand everything about Mish, or Connie, even Pete, even Mum. What if part of people, even people you love, will always be a mystery. That makes me feel a bit scared, but also quite grown up.' (p 235)

*Discussion Point:* How does Bella mature over the course of this novel?

*Discussion Point:* There are signs throughout the novel that Mish has developed an eating disorder, and later Connie confirms that Mish has been receiving help for this issue. Do you think Mish's behaviour – lying and stealing – and her eating disorder are related to Mark's excessive control and surveillance of Mish?

*Discussion Point:* 'He's NOT childish.' Words come out before I realise what I'm saying. 'You're being childish!' I shout at Mark. 'And you're sulking because none of the other adults agree with what you're doing. Not even your wife! And now Mish could be anywhere.' Silence. I'm thinking, What did I just say?

Then, 'Whoa,' says Pete quietly, 'out of the mouths of babes.' (p 198) Bella calls out Mark for immature behaviour. Why do you think Mark is behaving this way?

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

Study the writing style employed, and examine the following sub-topics:

### NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

*Discussion Point:* The story is told in first person, present tense, from Bella's point of view. Before and after the narrative, though, two poems (in first person elided with second person) appear, but they're not written by Bella. They're by Mish. How do these poems relate to the novel?

*Discussion Point:* How different might the narrative have been, if it had been written in third person?

### LITERARY DEVICES

*Activity:* Find examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below to identify examples.

<b>Simile</b>	
<b>Metaphors</b>	
<b>Other</b>	

### STRUCTURE

a) *Strong beginnings and endings to chapters* are one way of structuring a narrative, for example:

Beginning: 'June fell off her horse. At pony club.' (Ch 10, p 58)

Ending: 'I don't know where the guy went.' (Ch 6, p 22)

Which chapter beginning or ending was particularly significant in your opinion?

b) *Suspense* is the key to any narrative's structure. Discuss the suspenseful aspects of the plot in this novel.

### CHARACTERS

#### Main Characters:

Bella Jamison, and Connie, best friends, and Mish, Connie's cousin  
Bella's mum, Cara Jamison, and her partner Pete Hart

*Activity:* Write a character study of any of the main characters.

#### Minor Characters:

Connie's mum, Anna and dad, Seb, and younger sister, June  
Mish's parents, Renata (Ren) and Mark, and older brother, Jake  
Danni and Bianca, Mish's occasional friends  
Max, Penny and Asha, friends of Bella and Connie  
Kye, the young man at the statue



Miranda and Lori, Mish's old friends  
Cliffy, Bella's employer at the coffee van  
Lee, owner of the Pony Club  
Ms Ritter, SOSE teacher; Mr M, English teacher  
Jenny, store assistant at Baby Mart; James and two unnamed store assistants; Lucy, a medical student  
Daniel, Store Security, and Policewoman  
(Cara's parents and Pete's mother, brother Dave and wife, and their children Connor and Elise are mentioned but not seen.)

*Discussion Point:* Which of the minor characters intrigued or interested you the most?

## WRITING TASKS

*Activity:* Read this passage:

'I work on the What did we learn? question. It's hard to answer because some people say we learnt to go with the flow, to adjust when plans change, and accept that you can't control things. Mum and Pete were going to get married, but it didn't happen because of the restrictions. We learnt to adapt to altered conditions. We all wore face masks and had to do remote learning. Then the rules changed again, and we didn't do that anymore. But I don't think it taught everyone to go with the flow because some people lost confidence to go out. And people went backwards, like June was making heaps of progress with her speech therapy but then she had to do it on Zoom, which Anna said didn't really work. Anna says it's just one thing after another with June, ever since Covid. I google some stats about mental health that I hope will impress Ms Ritter.' (pp 106–7)

Then write your own analysis of what you learned during Covid. [See also **Worksheet 1.**]

*Discussion Point:* 'Connie has a new point that her dad told her. 'The way people work has changed,' she says when our table is discussing what we've got so far. 'Mum and Dad work from home on Wednesdays and Fridays now.' 'Not everyone does that,' says Mish.' (p 116) Debate the pros and cons of working from home.

*Activity:* Write a microstory (or 'flash fiction') on the theme of surveillance.

*Activity:* Test your students' comprehension by asking questions about these texts.

## VISUAL LITERACY

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>>

*Activity:* Design a new cover for the novel.

*Activity:* Illustrate the microstory you wrote above.

*Activity:* Design a patchwork pattern for a cover for Bella's new bed. Use collaged papers or fabrics, to create the pattern. [See also **Further Activities** below.]

*Activity:* Design a graphic novel page illustrating a scene in this book. eg the three girls being caught by store security and interviewed by a policewoman.

## FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'It's because we're too close to animals, we've taken over their habitat, and now it's easier to pass illnesses from animal to human.' (p 1)
2. 'I think of June, who had Covid and still isn't completely better. She's in the high-risk group. Immuno-compromised. We have learnt a lot of new words.' (p 2)
3. 'Uncle Mark listens to her conversations.' 'Really?' I ask. 'Can people even do that?' Connie nods. 'With a voice recorder. He put one in her school bag and for ages she didn't even know about it. She told me at pony club. And he has spyware.' (p 16)
4. 'I can understand the guy's concerned for his daughter. And since Covid you're all online more. There are definitely some creeps out there who can pretend they're someone else.' (p 50)
5. 'I'm not afraid of childish things,' says Pete when the song ends. 'I agree,' I tell him. 'You can keep on loving things that you loved as a kid. Like you and surfing. You just add adult things you love as you get older.' 'That's so true, Bells,' Pete says. 'I didn't have to lose one to enjoy the other.' He smiles at me. 'You're a wise one.' I feel so happy that Pete thinks I'm wise. That he respects what I say.' (p 92)
6. 'If yo-yos were invented now, they'd probably be a mindfulness exercise.' (p 102)
7. 'Max has a go at it, and he's really good! But then he's good at most things, like he can juggle, and use a diabolo, and walk on his hands. In primary school he did circus classes. He hardly ever does those things now because no one wants to stand out in high school. Especially in Year Seven. Like in Year Six, the times we got to go to school between lockdowns, being the oldest class in the school gave us confidence. Now we're the youngest again.' (p 115)
8. 'He says it's because he loves me.' 'Oh.' 'What a joke.' Mish jumps the small fence to the path. 'I hate love.' 'You can't say that you hate love,' says Connie. 'They're opposites.' (p 118)
9. 'I'd rather teach my child trust,' says Mum, 'than buy an app to control them.' (p 126)
10. 'How do you know who to trust?' I ask. 'I trust people until they give me a reason not to.' But haven't I just given him a reason not to? 'What's a reason not to?' I say. 'Like, if they lie to you once?' Pete thinks for a minute, lets out a sigh. 'If only it were that simple, Bells. It depends on the person, and the lie, and the circumstances.' 'So how do you know?' (p 138)
11. 'The paramedics arrive and take over. Pete comes tearing in, hair wet and bare feet. Everyone is laughing and crying, even the JB Hi-Fi guy. And it's not through a phone, or a screen, or a camera. It's IRL. It's real life.' (p 227)
12. 'Mum says, 'Poor Bella,' and gives me a hug. 'You'll look back on this time and wonder how you got through it.' I don't know if she means Sam's birth at Baby Mart, the stuff with Mish, the strange time of the pandemic, or all of the above. I don't know if it's Covid and the pandemic, or everything that's happened, but I feel a bit as if I'm floating, and every so often when I think things might be going back to normal, I realise I've forgotten what normal is. Sometimes at school, a teacher will say, 'When we go back to life before Covid,' and I think, Stop saying that, because we won't ever go back to life before Covid. Even when it goes completely, if it ever does, we won't be like we were before Covid. We're different now. It's changed us.' (p 229)

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Compare this novel to others that deal with surveillance and control. [See **Bibliography**.]
2. Design a poster about the pros and cons of technology that can be used to both connect people and exert control, such as smartphones, social media, online communities. [See **Worksheet 2**.]
3. The title *Look Me in the Eye* cleverly refers to both surveillance and trust. What other title might the novel have had?
4. Create a handcrafted phone case, like the one that Mish steals from the market. Use scraps of patterned material and a button, and stitch by hand, to create a unique and useful accessory. [See **Bibliography**.] You could also add a longer strap (of ribbon or cord) to the case if you want to carry it like a bag.
5. Make a patchwork cushion cover using scraps of uniformly measured squares of material. [See **Bibliography**.]
6. Make some origami animals like the ones Mish makes for June and later for Bella. [See **Bibliography**.]

## CONCLUSION

This is a perfectly crafted novel about surveillance, trust and other topics relative to the lives and concerns of teenagers in today's society. It is also a moving account of family dynamics, and how many different types of families exist. It is a novel about friendship, empathy, maturation and love.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jane Godwin** is the highly acclaimed and internationally published author of many books for children and young people, across all styles and ages. Children's Publisher at Penguin Books Australia for many years, Jane's books include her novels *A Walk in the Dark*, *Falling from Grace*, *As Happy as Here* (a CBCA Notable Book) and *When Rain Turns to Snow* (shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers and for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards) and picture books *Tilly* (illustrated by Anna Walker), and *The Best Hiding Place* (illustrated by Sylvia Morris), both shortlisted for the CBCA Picture Book of the Year Award. Jane is dedicated to pursuing quality and enriching reading and writing experiences for young people, and spends as much time as she can working with them in schools and communities and running literature and writing programs. [janegodwin.com.au](http://janegodwin.com.au)

# WORKSHEET 1 COVID WRITING ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY A

'In SOSE, Ms Ritter tells us about our new project. We have to prepare a five-minute oral presentation on the pandemic. She puts us in pairs, doesn't let us choose. Luckily I get put with Connie. Mish is put with Penny who's sitting at our table. Mish groans. Ms Ritter writes on the board: *What will you miss? What did you learn? What made you stronger?* We have to brainstorm ideas and write them down.' (p 60)

Invite students to respond to these questions below.

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## ACTIVITY B

Describe the worst thing you experienced while living through Covid.

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## ACTIVITY C

Describe the best thing you experienced while living through Covid.

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## ACTIVITY D

'It's hard to remember Covid properly because it's such a blur. What happened to Year Five? Year Six? There was no graduation, no school camp, no orientation days to secondary school, nothing to mark time anymore. Sometimes it feels as if that time never even happened.' (p 60)  
What events did you miss during Covid?

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## WORKSHEET 2. POSTER DRAWING ACTIVITY

Design a poster about the pros and cons of technology that can be used to both connect people and exert control. Enlarge on a photocopier once you've finished your design.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.