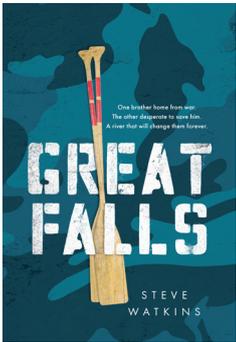




# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## Great Falls

by Steve Watkins  
ISBN: 9780763671556  
ARRP: \$24.99  
NZRRP: \$27.99  
September 2016

### Outline:

Shane has always worshiped his big brother, Jeremy. But three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan have taken their toll, and the easy-go-lucky brother Shane knew has been replaced by a surly drunk who carries his loaded 9mm with him everywhere and lives in the basement because he can't face life with his wife and two small children. When Jeremy shows up after Shane's football game and offers to take him to the family cabin overnight, Shane goes along — both to get away from a humiliation on the field and to keep an eye on Jeremy, who's AWOL from his job at Quantico and seems to have a shorter fuse than ever. But as the camping trip turns into a days-long canoe trip down the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers, Shane realizes he's in way over his head — and has no idea how to persuade Jeremy to return home and get the help he needs before it's too late. In a novel at once gripping and heartbreaking, Steve Watkins offers a stark exploration of the unseen injuries left by war.

### Author/Illustrator Information:

Steve Watkins is the author of the novels *Down Sand Mountain*, *What Comes After*, and *Juvie*. A retired professor of journalism, creative writing, and Vietnam War literature, he now teaches Ashtanga yoga and works with the child-advocacy organization CASA. Steve Watkins lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

### How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

#### These notes are for:

- Secondary years 7-10
- Ages 12+

#### Key Learning Areas:

- English

#### Example of:

- Fiction

#### Themes/Ideas:

- Family
- War
- Mental Illness
- Trauma
- Emotional and Physical Journeys

#### National Curriculum Focus:\*

Year 7

[ACELT1619](#)  
[ACELT1620](#)  
[ACELT1621](#)  
[ACELT1803](#)  
[ACELT1622](#)  
[ACELT1625](#)  
[ACELT1805](#)  
[ACELY1804](#)  
[ACELY1724](#)

Year 8

[ACELA1543](#)  
[ACELT1626](#)  
[ACELT1627](#)  
[ACELT1628](#)  
[ACELT1807](#)  
[ACELT1632](#)  
[ACELY1732](#)

Year 9

[ACELT1633](#)  
[ACELT1771](#)  
[ACELT1634](#)  
[ACELT1636](#)  
[ACELY1742](#)  
[ACELY1743](#)  
[ACELY1744](#)

Year 10

[ACELT1639](#)  
[ACELT1640](#)  
[ACELT1641](#)  
[ACELT1812](#)  
[ACELT1642](#)  
[ACELT1774](#)  
[ACELY1749](#)  
[ACELY1750](#)

\*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia  
Locked Bag 22  
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

Ph +61 2 9517 9577  
Fax +61 2 9517 9997

These notes were created by Steve Spargo.  
For enquiries please contact:  
[educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au](mailto:educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au)

Notes © 2016 Walker Books Australia Pty. Ltd.  
All Rights Reserved



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

## Discussion Questions and Activities:

### Before Reading

Before reading *Great Falls*, view the cover of the book.

Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The tagline
- The publisher
- The blurb

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book – how close were your predictions to the actual novel?

Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

What is the purpose of this novel (i.e. to entertain, to inform or to persuade)? How can you tell? Write a paragraph about the novel using only informative language that is unbiased. Write another paragraph using persuasive language to convince the reader to share your opinion of the novel.

What are the themes in this novel? Identify and list the themes as a class or in small groups. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Jeremy is a returned serviceman who, according to the Shane, has changed a great deal from before his tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Using evidence from the text, write two character reports: one for Jeremy before his tours of duty and one for after his return. How did he change? What do you think caused this change? How do these changes affect those around him?

Discuss the relationship between Shane and Annie. Why do you think Shane spends so much time with Annie and the kids? Investigate how the relationship changes throughout the novel and the reasons for this change. Using evidence from the text, discuss how you think Shane feels about this relationship as opposed to how Annie feels about it? Do they feel the same?

“Mom nods. ‘Yes, Ted. Of course. I see your point.’ Her voice is flat, and faint, coming from so far away, wherever it is she travels to when the Colonel goes off on her. I’ve gotten pretty good at doing that, too.” (P 38)  
How would you describe the Colonel and his parenting style? Describe his relationship with Shane and Jeremy’s mother. What kind of home life and upbringing have Shane and Jeremy had? How do you think this has affected them? How might events have run differently if the Shane and Jeremy’s parents were more aware of their children’s needs and emotions?

The author makes very deliberate word choices in the pig-shooting scene in chapters 12 and 13 to convey a message to reader of how Shane feels about the situation and his perception of Jeremy’s behaviour. Identify key phrases or sentences in these chapters and present to the class on how the word choices affect the meaning taken by the reader. Rewrite the phrase or sentence using different language to experiment with meaning and mood.

There are a number of instances where Shane believes his brother is making a poor decision, but fails to stand up to him. Find one of these scenes and discuss why you think Shane doesn’t stand up to his brother. How could things have gone differently if he had chosen to stand up to him?

“Minutes later the lights from the River Riders store disappear as we glide around the bend and out of sight to the rest of the world.” (p 107)

Do you think Jeremy planned all the activities (hunting, canoeing, etc) ahead of time, or that he was thinking up new activities as they went along to avoid going home? What implications does each of these ideas have on Jeremy’s motivations and state of mind. Do you think Shane willingly went along with the plan, also afraid to go home? Or do you think he went along because he was afraid to stand up to his brother?

*Great Falls* deals with issues of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, domestic violence and suicide. Using the following the list as a starting point, create a list of resources available to those affected by these issues.

- Beyond Blue [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) (Depression, suicide prevention, PTSD)
- Black Dog Institute [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au) (Depression, suicide prevention, PTSD)
- Lifeline [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) (Depression, suicide prevention, PTSD)
- Phoenix Australia [www.phoenixaustralia.org/](http://www.phoenixaustralia.org/) (PTSD)
- At Ease <http://at-ease.dva.gov.au/> - Mental health (including PTSD and suicide prevention) for military
- White Ribbon [www.whiteribbon.org.au](http://www.whiteribbon.org.au) (Domestic violence)
- Reach Out <http://au.reachout.com/> (Domestic violence)

“Got it when I was deployed. They give that stuff [Ativan] out like candy.” (P 112)

What message is this novel trying to convey about the American military? Is the author conveying it in a positive or negative light? Find examples to support your idea.

What is the significance of Jeremy telling Shane about *Heart of Darkness* on page 150? What parallels can be drawn between Jeremy’s experience and the parts of the novel he talks about?



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

Discuss Shane and Jeremy's violent altercation with Danny and Glory in chapter 27. What is the significance of Shane getting involved and throwing Glory into the river?

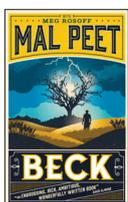
A novel will describe the setting and action in words, allowing the reader to visualise using their imagination. A comic strip or graphic novel uses illustrations to show the reader the setting, action and character's emotions. Create a comic strip of a key scene from the novel.

What is the meaning of the title *Great Falls*? Does it have more than one meaning? Does it mean different things to different characters?

Write a book report on *Great Falls*. Write about how much you enjoyed the book, using evidence from the text to support your evaluation. Make a recommendation about who would be interested in this book and draw connections to similar or related books.

Imagine that a movie was being made of *Great Falls*. In small groups, create a soundtrack to accompany some of the key scenes, thinking particularly about the mood you want to convey. You could either make a compilation of existing songs or compose your own musical pieces. Present your soundtrack to the class, explaining why you have chosen the pieces you have.

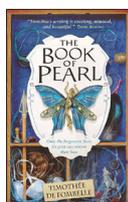
## More great Young Adult Fiction:



**Beck**  
by Mal Peet  
HB 9781406331127



**Quarantine Book 1:  
The Loners**  
by Patrick Ness  
PB 9781606844380



**The Book of Pearl**  
by Timothée de  
Fombelle  
PB 9781406364620  
Classroom ideas  
available



**The Rest Of Us  
Just Live Here**  
by Patrick Ness  
HB 9781406331165  
PB 9781406365566  
Classroom ideas  
available