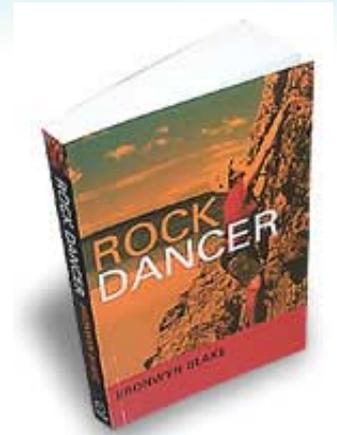


## FOR THE TEACHER

## Rock Dancer by Bronwyn Blake

Format: Novel

Extent: 272 pp



### Overview

**Rock Dancer** is a poignant and moving story that tells the story of how fourteen year old elite gymnast, Leah Norfolk, is able to come to terms with herself after her best friend, Morgan, fell from an apparatus while she was the catcher. Leah is completely traumatised by what happened and because of Morgan's mother's attitude, she is not able to entirely discount the idea that perhaps she allowed her friend to fall deliberately so that she could gain the final berth in the Olympic Team.

Leah has just moved to a new place and the story is set on a rock climbing expedition that is part of a school camp at a beautiful national park. It is here, amongst a group of ordinary children her own age, that Leah is gradually able to adjust and face up to being with herself.

The end of the story brings a satisfactory closure to the whole affair, and we know Leah will be able to start living again.

We watch Leah's progress from a totally traumatised, vulnerable person who feels she is responsible for her best friend's injury to gradually emerge through different experiences to face up to her new life with a positive attitude.

In the course of the novel, the reader learns a lot about the others on the camp and what makes them behave as they do.

### Author Profile

**Bronwyn Blake** is a Central Victorian writer, who lives on a bush property near the historic gold-rush town of Maldon. Bronwyn has worked as a teacher and in a number of other fields including fine arts and management. She has lived in many of the world's wild places, including Alaska, but the Australian bush remains her first love. Her first young adult novel, *Find me a River*, was a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book in 2002.

### Assessment checklist

After reading **Rock Dancer** by Bronwyn Blake and completing the activities, students will gain the skills to:

- deal with challenging themes and concepts
- recognise and talk about gender issues
- see the diversity of socio-cultural groups
- discuss values and attitudes
- recognise symbols, use of irony and repetition
- connect with personal experiences
- identify techniques in texts
- recognise chronological shifts

## FOR THE STUDENT

## Activities

### Small-group activities

1. Look at the way the story unfolds: what does the opening do? How is it presented? Where is the reader taken in the second chapter?
2. From the novel, choose a descriptive passage that you found enabled you to picture the place the author was describing. Examine the ingredients the author used to achieve this.
3. Look for a narrative piece where the story is being told.
4. Find a portion that contains instructions and informs the reader.
5. Choose a piece where the author has established atmosphere or mood and look at how this has been conveyed.
6. What is the purpose of a journal? In the novel, what does it enable the author to do?
7. Examine in greater detail how the story is told. Look at the use of:
  - first person narrative where Leah is telling the story herself
  - third person narrative where the author takes over
  - direct speech where other characters are speaking, indicated by inverted commas

Find instances of each of these from the text.

8. What does a journal allow Leah to do?
9. What images go around in Leah's head? What does she often refer to them as?
10. Look at how some events are repeated and ascertain how the author is able to do this and the purpose of repetition.
11. Where does the novel get its name?

### Whole-class activities

1. As a class, discuss the following concepts:
  - fear, change, choices, ethics, having fun, being normal, accidents, friends, hatred, jealousy, trust, relationships, risks, attitude, responsibility, anorexia, pressure, lies, problems, dreams/nightmares, understanding, control, cooperation, coincidence, belonging, confidence, rumours, motivation
  - seeing things from different perspectives
  - letting things get out of proportion
  - the importance of being honest with yourself
  - appreciation of other people's skills and strengths
  - gender issues
  - saying you are sorry
  - the journey
2. Comment on the relationship between Leah and Tim, how it changes and why.
3. People's behaviour is often affected by their background and what is going on in their lives. Discuss this in relation to several of the characters in **Rock Dancer**.
4. Make a storyboard of the novel, setting out the action and the time frame of the story, and where each portion takes place.

## Individual activities

### Characters

1. Do a character study of Leah, covering her present position, what she has experienced, how she acts and how she regards herself. Talk about how she is able finally to come to terms with what has happened and face the future.
2. Do a short profile of each of the other children from Year 8 on the camp, touching on their personalities, backgrounds, interests and skills.

### Vocabulary and language

3. There is an example of irony on page 10 when Leah remarks about living without electricity when her father is the chief engineer of a power plant that generates this power; and again, on page 153, when Sarah says about a teacher, 'She's as sarcastic as sulphuric acid and she teaches human relationships'. Find out more about the place of irony in writing and write down some examples in your own words.
4. Make a list of terminology to do with gymnastics.
5. Compile a list of words that pertain to rock climbing.
6. There are many passages where the reader understands how Leah is feeling. Find some of these and jot down words that show her feelings and emotions.

### Writing

7. Describe Leah's old life. Why is she going to start a new life?
8. Describe the search and what happened when they found Leah.
9. How is Leah finally able to come to terms with her past?
10. What would it be like to be Leah Norfolk? Retell Leah's story in your own words.
11. Write about what it would be like to leave your home and everything you are familiar with to go to another place.
12. Put yourself in Sarah's place and tell your story about the camp to your cousins at home.
13. Comment on what happens at the end of **Rock Dancer** and what you thought of the conclusion to the story.
14. Explain the relevance to Leah of the Chinese proverb: *Every long journey starts with a single step.* (14)
15. 'Climbing isn't just a physical sport, it's also in the mind.' (157)  
Do you think this is true of all sports?
16. Write about what the life of an elite athlete would be like.
17. 'Maybe I'm not the only one who kids myself about stuff.' (271)  
Do you?

## Research

By looking on the Internet or going to the library, find out more about:

- Icarus
- the Krautungalung people and their way of life
- the Stolen Generation
- navigation
- Wilson's Promontory
- National Parks in your area
- 'My loaded dog, waiting to drop that explosive with the fuse into my lap.' (184)
- To what does this refer? Where does the quotation come from?