

Longacre Press Teachers' Resource Kit

Young Adult Fiction

Thieves

a novel

Ella West

Nicky has a secret. Now you see her: now you don't.

She has the ability to disappear and reappear in another place – her gift controlled through the powers of thought alone.

Someone else has discovered Nicky's extra-sensory talent: a group called the Project. Anonymous, benign in manner, yet also sinister in its secrecy, the Project spirits Nicky and four others away to a desert hideaway.

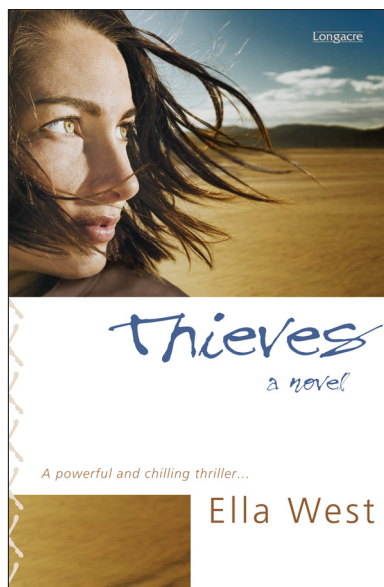
Constantly monitored by security, taken from their families and even their own countries, Nicky and her fellow travellers are gradually pushed into a world of espionage and intrigue.

But who are they working for? Is the Project inherently good, or is it inherently evil? A powerful and chilling thriller from an exceptional new talent.

A powerful and chilling thriller...

The Author

Ella West works as a journalist and *Thieves* is her first novel. She is the winner of the 2006 Louis Johnson/Creative New Zealand Bursary for New Writers and is currently writing a sequel to *Thieves*.



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RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS

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Bill Nichol

Author Statement

How did I write *Thieves*?

I cheated. I wrote a book which was entirely in my head. I didn't have to do any research, talk to anyone about how or why or even if this story could this happen. And I worked this way because I didn't want to tell anyone what I was doing. Of course a few close friends knew, and my family, but I didn't want to have to approach someone and say 'I'm a writer, could you please tell me how...?'

What this gave me, which I really liked, was a novel with few details about the characters' origins. The characters in *Thieves* could be any group of teenagers from almost anywhere in the world. Coupled with the first person narration, I hope the story is authentic and real to the reader: This could happen to them, or someone they know. It is not a fantasy. This could really happen.

I write from the beginning, go on to the end and then stop. It is the only way I can do it. I did once plan a book from beginning to end before I wrote the first word. It never got any further – I knew what was going to happen so why write it?

I write to find out what is going to happen. For me, it's just like reading a book, except it takes a lot longer (two years for *Thieves*). This way I have to finish it because I want to know what happens. It means I end up doing some back-writing, filling in details at the start so the bits later on make more sense, but it is a small price to pay.

With Nicky, I had the idea of a teenage girl hiding in a closet and that is simply how the story began. When I wrote those first few words (which have survived almost numerous drafts) I had no idea about who she was or what was going to happen to her. About a third of the way through I knew how the book was going to end but not how Nicky, Paul, Jake, Tina and Shelley were going to get there. Writing in an instinctive way, I do have to have a lot of confidence in the story – the process is one step at a time and I have to believe Nicky is taking me in the right direction. She has a lot resting on her shoulders.

Ella West

Comprehension

Chapter 1

- How does Tina view the place the travellers have been taken to? How does this contrast to Nicky's reaction?

Chapter 2

- What sways Nicky to actually listen to the woman interviewing her?
- Why do you think Nicky has an extreme reaction to seeing the others 'travel'?

Chapter 3

- In what ways is Nicky 'captive'?

Chapter 4

- Why aren't news channels shown?
- Why does Nicky make up stuff to tell her counsellor? What does she achieve by this?
- What does the last paragraph reveal about how the Project views itself (p. 39)? What do you think this change in Nicky's tone reveals?

Chapter 5

- Why does Nicky assume the Project is responsible for her parents death?

Chapter 6

- What does Nicky find that seems odd, at the base? What purpose could it have?
- (p. 50) How does this last paragraph differ to Nicky's earlier reaction? Why was she willing to believe before?
- How does Nicky think the Project sees her?

Chapter 7

- How is the garden different to other parts of the base? Why does Nicky seek refuge there?
- Why does Paul not want to escape? Why do you think he reacts the way he does to Nicky? Is there more than he's saying?
- Why does the Project mean so much to Paul?

Chapter 8

- Why does Nicky like travelling with Paul?
- Why is David so angry?
- What danger does this chapter highlight? Is there any way they could have avoided what happened?

Chapter 9

- How does Nicky explain Paul's being unable to travel out of the lake? How does she know about this?
- Why does Paul get upset with the lost boy?
- Why is Nicky important for the search and rescue element of the travellers' work?
- Why do they only find kids? What is the criteria? What does this suggest about the Project's motives?

Chapter 10

- What makes Nicky doubt the Project is working for the 'greater good'?

Chapter 11

- Can you find an example where Ginny is evasive in her answers?
- Why do you think Paul has to go with Nicky on the thieving mission?

Chapter 12

- Why does Nicky fixate on the calendar and keeping track of the days?
- What is it about the little girl's death that affects Paul so deeply? Why do you think this is?
- What does the way Ginny describes the final 'travel' back sound like? (pp. 105–106)

Chapter 13

- What are the two contrasting arguments that explain Paul's behaviour? What seems more likely?

Chapter 14

- What is the last thing Paul can remember? How much of the traumatic event has been lost/blocked from his memory?
- What has supposedly happened to David and Ginny? What does Nicky think has really happened?

Chapter 15

- Why has Paul been avoiding Nicky?
- What makes Paul want to escape?

Chapter 16

- What problems can Nicky see that could hinder their escape plans?

- What does Nicky think they'd face in the outside world?
- What, as far as Nicky knows, is the 'global effort'?

Chapter 17

- Why does Nicky get upset at the end of this chapter? Does this relate to the wider situation?

Chapter 18

- What is unusual about this mission?
- How have things obviously changed? What hasn't changed?

Chapter 19

- What appears to have happened in this episode?
- What does that suggest the Project's motivation in following is?

Chapter 20

- What does Morgan reveal to Nicky about her situation?
- What are the possible reasons given for why the assassin wasn't stopped?

- Why does Nicky think she is less affected by what happened on the mission? Why isn't she shocked?
- What have the events in Singapore done to the other travellers?
- What does Nicky speculate about the instructors? Are they in the same boat? Who has the information?
- What makes Nicky doubt if escaping is a good idea?
- What makes the group finally realise they have to escape?

Chapter 21

- Why is the Pink Floyd lyric significant to Nicky?
- What is strange about how Paul was brought to the Project? What does this imply?
- What seems almost like an omen in this chapter?

Chapter 22

- Why doesn't Paul just leave the bracelets where they are when taken off?

Research Topics

- Research alternative ways of measuring or recording time. If you were imprisoned, or stranded away from the time recording methods we are used to, how could you create your own calendar?
- Research spy or secret service projects from history. See what you can find about the methods they used to find and pass on secret information. You could look at; the Resistance in occupied France during World War Two; tactics used in guerilla warfare, etc.
- Research the work of Search and Rescue teams. What are the effects of exposure in different climates? Look at hypothermia, heat stress, dehydration and oxygen deprivation? What effects do these have on the human body? How can they be prevented and treated?
- Is it possible to create an artificial climate that would allow you to build a garden in a desert? Research technologies that allow this kind of controlled climate, eg. the Eden Project biodome in Cornwall.

Creative Response

- The Project has commissioned you to design a garden for their headquarters. Their brief states this garden must be international in feel – it should give no clues as to its location. Remember to think about differences in garden style/design as well as the plants used.
- In pairs, find a space in your school to do the room-changing exercise. Take turns to memorise the space, have the other person change some things about it, and see if you can remember what has changed. Keep a record of your results – does it get easier? Share your findings with the class.
- Write a script for an exclusive television interview with the father of the two boys that Nicky and Paul rescue, and perform or film it.
- You are a journalist following up the late night fatal crash of a prominent couple in the community. Their daughter, Nicky, is missing. Write a newspaper article following your investigation.

Discussion Topics

- How is the restriction of information used to control the travellers? What effect does this have on them? Can you think of any examples where this happens in real life?
- In what ways are the travellers imprisoned? Do they have any choice about what they do? Can you think of any examples of times they tried to take control of their situation? What was the result?
- Is there any way for the travellers to tell whether the Project is working for good or bad? What does the circumstances of their being there suggest? What about the contractual element?
- Why is it so important for Nicky to try and keep track of what day it is? What do you think would happen to someone who had lost track of the progression of time? How essential is it to know your location and what day it is?
- Why does the fact that the search and rescue missions the Project is involved in are done on a contract seem sinister? If the results are positive, does it matter what the original motivation is? Does it make a difference whether acts of goodness or kindness are done without motivation to gain, or for mercenary measures?
- The Project witnesses (with knowledge of what will happen) an act of terrorism, yet does nothing to stop it. Does this make them culpable? Is their inaction evidence of a greater guilt? Is it sometimes better not to act?
- Why would the Project keep the travellers ‘in the dark’? Does this serve a purpose other than control? Can you think of other real-life examples where information is restricted in order to control? Or protect?
- Nicky and Paul try to find out if they have other gifts besides the ability to travel. If you had special powers what would you choose and why?
- Do we really need friends? Paul gets angry with Nicky for trying to save him in the forest instead of looking after herself. Is it better to care about others or should you be strong on your own?
- The Project gives the travellers everything they need – food, clothes, people to talk to, books, television. What do they not give them that they really need?
- How do Nicky’s surroundings at the Project affect her? Why is the garden so significant for her?
- Nicky and the other travellers believe the Project gets them to do ‘good things’. How important is this in a person’s life? What would you give up to help others?
- What do you think is going to happen to the five travellers after the book finishes? Will they stay together? And what are the most important things they need to survive the next 24 hours, the next week, the next month?