



TEACHERS' NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary (ages 12+; years 8 to 12)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Understanding, Personal and Social Capability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A suspenseful and chilling read that will stay with you long after you turn the final page.
- Prepare yourself for witches, curses, ghost stories, dark forests with dark secrets, and a quarry steeped in mystery – all told through such stunning writing, it will leave you breathless.
- *What We All Saw* tells two stories – one a legend, one real. But which is which?

THEMES

- The subjectivity of truth
- 'Seeing', perception and the senses
- Storytelling
- Witches in history and culture
- Friendship
- Trust
- Horror
- WWI and WWII
- Growing up in the 1970s

PREPARED BY

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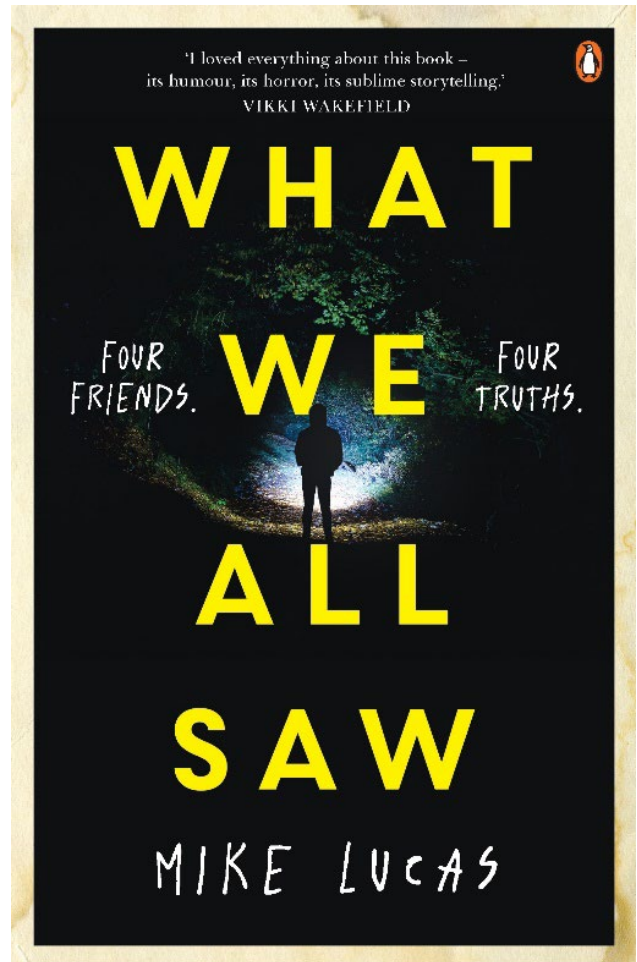
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What We All Saw Mike Lucas

PLOT SUMMARY

Witches only exist in stories. Everyone knows that. But what if the stories are real?

FOUR FRIENDS. FOUR TRUTHS. ONE NIGHTMARE.

If you wander into the wood ...

If you hear scratching sounds from the Old Quarry ...

If you go too close to the edge ...

WATCH. OUT.

'I loved everything about this book – its humour, its horror, its sublime storytelling.' VIKKI WAKEFIELD

'A tense and atmospheric tale of childhood fears turned frighteningly real.' SEAN WILLIAMS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Lucas is the author of several picture books including Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book *Olivia's Voice*. He has also written and published several books of humorous children's poetry, has had work highly commended in magazines and contributed to poetry anthologies.

In 2017 Mike was one of the main organisers of the Adelaide Festival of Children's Books. He presents writing and poetry workshops at schools, owns a bookshop in Blackwood, South Australia, and works as a full-time engineer. He doesn't sleep much. *What We All Saw* is Mike's first YA novel.

Find out more about Mike at: mikelucas.com.au

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Mike says:

There were three main influences that contributed to *What We All Saw*: witches; my childhood home and adventures in England in the 1970s; and my experience of becoming vision impaired.

The traditional image of the witch

The traditional image of the witch, with the crooked angular features and black hat, as portrayed in folklore and stories such as *The Wizard of Oz*, has always fascinated and scared me. To place this version of a witch within a book for older children and still provide a degree of realism to the story was one of the biggest challenges. It eventually came from the children's fear and imagination, starting with Charlie's story and being amplified by Sam's head trauma at the clearing beside Hags Drop. The image of a witch, a hag, creeping up the stairs of a house to take away a child is terrifying. And I put this image and fear into Charlie's head and, ultimately, into that of the reader.

Growing up in England in the 1970s

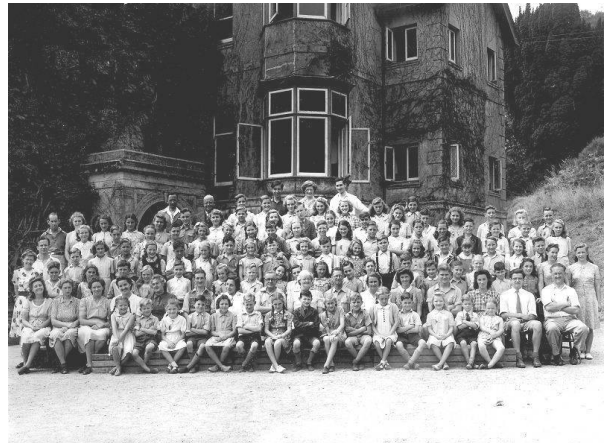
I grew up in the 1970s, when children would leave their houses in the morning and not return until the sun went down. I played in the wood with friends, skirting around slate quarries and swimming in the cold river waters. I had a friend like Gray who came from a broken home, but who was somebody you could depend on when trouble arrived.

The manor in the story is based on Leigham Manor, which existed in some form from the Domesday Book to 1988 (see pictures below). As children, we would creep past the crumbling gate posts and onto the grounds, but we never went too close – there were stories circulating about who lived there and what would happen to us if we were caught. Of course, it was deserted by then, but we didn't know that.

The story about Charlie's father buying cigarettes for the German prisoners of war was based on the true story of my father doing the same when he was a young child.



Leigham Manor from above



Leigham Manor and its staff

Experiencing vision impairment

Shell's blindness comes from my experience of living with the risk of losing my eyesight and the reality of it finally happening in one eye. I had a detached retina when I was 16, in 1984, but was fortunate enough to have my sight saved by one of the top UK eye surgeons. Since that time I have had laser treatment for weak spots on the retinas of both eyes. I had six holes discovered in my right eye in 2016, and in 2017 another detached retina in my left eye. After seven operations in as many weeks in 2018, I finally lost the sight in that eye.

What got me through that period, while I was off work, was sitting down and writing the first draft of *What We All Saw*. I was worried and frustrated about partially losing my vision, so instead I thought about creating a character who had been blind from birth, and how that might affect their perception of the world.

The character of Shell emerged, along with how a friendship group might form around her. In the end, Shell became the strongest character of the group, the



glue that kept the four children together until the very end.

I wrote *What We All Saw* as a way to turn a negative experience into a positive one. Though I can never say it was worth losing the sight in one eye, it never would have come about if I hadn't gone through what I did.

During the writing and editing process, too, I was grateful to reader Olivia Muscat for educating me on the realities of being vision impaired from birth, and for helping to make Shell the strong character she became during the evolution of this story.

Questions and activities

1. What is the Doomsday Book? Research this historical text from medieval England and its importance in tracing generations and places through history.
2. Are there any abandoned buildings or historical sites near where you live? Research their history and write a story about someone who might have lived there.
3. Many authors are inspired by events in their own lives, but some stories are more personal than others, and help the author to process emotional events in their life through their writing. *Macquarie Dictionary* describes *catharsis* as 'the effect of art in purifying the emotions (applied by Aristotle to the relief or purgation of the emotions of the audience or performers effected through pity and terror by tragedy and certain kinds of music)'. How do you think writing this book helped Mike to work through the emotions he experienced after losing sight in one eye? Why do we read stories about trauma or tragedy? What benefits do such stories have in increasing our empathy and in helping us to process our own emotions?

WRITING STYLE

Nineteen seventy-six was the year we covered up the death of a twelve-year-old boy, hiding his body from his family and the world forever. It was the year we learned the truth, and the lies, about Hags Drop. And it was the last year Shell, Gray, Charlie and I spent together as childhood friends. (p. 1)

What We All Saw is narrated with the framing device of the fictional perspective of a man aged in his forties, who is looking back at the tragic and traumatic events of one summer in his childhood. The framing device sets up a story within a story.

The story is written in first person, and past tense. It also includes dream sequences and stories told by characters, which are separated out from the main narrative in italics.



Questions and activities

1. Why do you think Mike Lucas chose to use the framing device of an adult looking back at childhood? Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of this framing device. How does it change your reading of the story?
2. What other books or films have you read or seen that have a similar perspective of an older person looking back at an earlier point in their life? Some examples include: *The Witches* by Roald Dahl; *The Power of One* by Bryce Courtenay; *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens; *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville; *The Hobbit* film is narrated as if by Bilbo Baggins writing his memoirs; the film *Stand by Me* (based on the novella 'The Body' by Stephen King) is narrated by a freelance writer looking back at finding a body with his childhood friends.
3. The novel could also be described as a 'coming of age' story, because it is about a pivotal time in Sam's life, between childhood and becoming a teenager, when he is a part of events that someone his age wouldn't usually deal with, or that cause him to have to make adult decisions. What other novels have you read with 'coming of age' themes, or that feature a pivotal time in a young person's life that changes them forever? Some examples include: *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas; *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak; *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini; *Jasper Jones* by Craig Silvey; *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger; *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon; *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.
4. Would you consider Sam to be an unreliable narrator? Or is he telling the truth as he saw it or remembers it? What factors in the story make it difficult for Sam to get to the truth of what happened?



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Look at the book's cover. Identify visual techniques used in the design that help you form ideas or assumptions about what the story will be about.
2. What genre do you think the story is? Which elements of the cover gave you hints about the genre (for instance, colours, fonts chosen, imagery)?
3. What do the title and image tell you about 'seeing'?
4. Predict what you think may happen in the story. In this short premise make sure to include what you think the characters will be like, what they will 'see' and how the story will be resolved.
5. The blurb on the back cover is very short. Why do you think the publishers and author chose to give minimal information about the characters and story in the blurb?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Storytelling

Charlie stopped walking, and we all followed suit. The branches curled above us, obscuring the sky, and it was as though the midday sun had been dimmed just so that Charlie could build up an atmosphere for what he was about to say.

'I'll tell you a story if you like,' he said. 'Just like Mr Grant told it to me.' Then, as though we were preschoolers at our first day away from our parents: 'But it's pretty scary.' (p. 14)

I was enthralled with the story, but had the same issue on my mind as Gray was about to share with us.

'What has that got to do with the witch that lives in the wood?'

'Nothing,' said Charlie. 'It's just a story.'

And we all picked up leaves and threw them in his general direction as he jumped up and ran from us, laughing and sticking his fingers up and making the most of the power he held over us with his storytelling prowess. (p. 22)

And anyway, what happened isn't important. It's all about what you believe. (p. 306)

In many ways *What We All Saw* muses on the power of storytelling to shape and affect our perceptions of the world. Charlie tells a story about a witch to his friends, which then potentially affects how they perceive later events. The narrative constantly questions reality and philosophises about truth versus belief, folklore versus

history – cleverly making the point that if you're the storyteller, you get to make up what other people believe to be true.

Questions and activities

1. Discuss the power of storytelling in influencing truth. How does Mr Grant's and Charlie's storytelling elevate their stories? Do you think stories are better when certain elements are fictionalised?
2. Have a re-read of Mr Grant's and Charlie's stories, thinking about the narrative voice and tone. How is it different to the way the rest of the story is written?
3. What are some of the techniques Charlie and Mr Grant use to keep their listeners interested in the stories they're telling? Does author Mike Lucas use some of the same techniques? For instance, consider how these storytelling techniques are used in the story (and the stories within the story!) to build tension, mystery and intrigue:
 - Pauses
 - Distractions
 - Cliffhangers
 - Surprise
 - Escalating tension
 - Conflict
 - Backstory
 - Foreshadowing
 - Misdirection
4. Compare and contrast the exploration of storytelling in *What We All Saw* with Ang Lee's *Life of Pi*. For instance, consider these lines of dialogue from the final scene in *Life of Pi*:

Adult Pi Patel: *So which story do you prefer?*

Writer: *The one with the tiger. That's the better story.*

How can this quote be related to the events and stories told in *What We All Saw*?

Which of the story versions in *What We All Saw* is the 'better story' – that Denny tried to hurt Sam and his friends and fell off the cliff while doing so, or that a witch dragged him over the edge, or that there is a curse on the village that prophesied his death?
5. What do you believe happened? Did the ending explain what happened, or were you left with more questions about the truth?
6. Extension activity: research Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave', which explores the nature of belief versus knowledge. How does the Plato's ideas apply to



modern storytelling, and to the 'truths' and beliefs of the characters in *What We All Saw* in particular?

Witches – myths, fact and history



Was there ever a witch in the wood? There was a woman and a girl who had been considered by the local villagers to be witches. Mainly because they were different. (p. 301)

In *What We All Saw*, we hear various different stories about witches, ranging from myths, rumours and stories to descriptions of real historical events where those considered witches were persecuted, such as the Bideford Witchcraft Trials of North Devon in 1682 (as discussed on p. 150).

Questions and activities

1. What do you know about witches? What stories or media about witches have you read or seen? How are witches portrayed in popular culture?
2. Research the history of the persecution of witches. How has our perception of witches or witchcraft changed over time?
3. Watch the following TED-Ed video on the Salem Witch Trials: <https://youtu.be/NVd8kuufBhM>
The video says the Salem Witch Trials are 'a cautionary tale of the dangers of groupthink and scapegoating'.
4. What is 'groupthink'? What are the possible risks of groupthink? What strategies and actions can we take to ensure that we avoid groupthink?
5. What is 'scapegoating'? Which characters could be considered scapegoats in *What We All Saw*? For instance, discuss whether these characters are scapegoats and why or how they came to be seen or treated this way: Flora; Gray; the German prisoners of war.
6. Consider in particular the reasons given on p. 284 for why 'They needed somebody to blame'. You might also consider the saying 'History is written by the victors', and how it might apply to the treatment and depiction of so-called witches.
7. What parallels can be drawn between historical trials such as the Salem Witch Trials or Bideford Witchcraft Trials and what Flora and her mother experience in the novel?

Representation of disability

Throughout *What We All Saw*, it was important to Mike to represent Shell in a positive and realistic light, with her blindness being an integral part of her character but not defining her or being viewed by Shell or her friends as a weakness. Shell is often shown as the smartest and most resourceful of the friends – it is Shell who encourages Sam and Charlie to say out loud what they saw and heard on the cliff that night. It is Shell who often decides on their next steps. The boys value Shell's opinion. And Shell isn't afraid to stand up to the bullies or to Gray when he is in an angry mood.

Questions and activities

1. Think about books and films you have read or seen that portray disabled characters, and whether the depiction of disability could be considered positive and realistic, or negative and stereotyped.

Although opinions can vary, some examples of disabled characters that are generally considered to be positive depictions include:

- Cece in *El Deaf* by Cece Bell (d/Deaf)
- Erin in *Please Don't Hug Me* by Kay Kerr (autism)
- Piper in *Future Girl* by Asphyxia (d/Deaf)
- Sam in *The Fall* by Tristan Bancks (limb difference)
- Perry in *Are You Seeing Me?* by Darren Groth (autism)
- Toph from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (vision impaired)
- Percy Jackson from the Percy Jackson series (dyslexia)
- Auggie in *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio (facial difference)

Can you also identify any disability representation in films or books that could be considered negative or to perpetuate outdated or harmful stereotypes or tropes? Some examples of these tropes might include:

- villains being portrayed with facial scars or other disabilities (such as some of the James Bond villains, Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, or Shakespeare's Richard III)
- portraying a disabled character as 'inspirational' or 'heroic' because of their disability
- portraying a disabled character as having enhanced abilities or 'superpowers'
- portraying a disabled character as being helpless or someone to be pitied or to be rescued (an example is media reports that describe a person as



a 'victim' or 'sufferer')

– portraying characters whose disabilities are 'cured' or 'healed', with the implication that this can be the only 'happy ending' for that person.

2. Consider the ways in which society has changed over the last century in terms of inclusion and accessibility. What resources might be available to Shell if she were twelve years old in the 2020s rather than the 1970s? What areas could still be improved to make our society more accessible and inclusive?
3. What is ableism? Research ableism and ableist language and find examples. Are there words or terms that you have used without realising they are considered ableist?

'Seeing' and the senses



I had been delirious, hallucinating, seeing things that weren't there. The world had been put on a kilter, and I had momentarily slid off. (p. 67)

1. Think about the title – *What We All Saw* – and the way the story plays with the motif and symbolism of 'seeing' and 'sight', as well as other senses.
2. Make a list of what each of the characters in the story see, hear, smell, taste and touch that are relevant to working out the 'truth' of what happened. How do their senses mislead them versus help them?
3. Read pp. 88–89 where Shell describes how she listens and understands instead of seeing with her eyes. Does Shell 'see' more than the boys do, or just differently?
4. Write a scene or short story that uses all five senses to describe the setting and what is happening. Use these descriptions to evoke a particular tone, emotion and genre – for instance, horror or fear, romance and love, adventure and action, or conflict and anger.

Friendship

1. Fill out a character web detailing the characteristics of the four friends. Pay close attention to their upbringing, strengths, weaknesses, interests, etc. (For example, Gray comes from a broken home. How does this affect his dispositions, his adulthood, and how others treat him?)
2. Pay particular attention to the opening chapter and how it shows the dynamic of the group.
3. Based on your character profiles, write about how their friendship helps them uncover the truth. How do their different strengths help Sam, Charlie, Gray and Shell work together?
4. Did you think the friends would stay together when they went to high school? Why or why not? Were there any parts of the story that indicated they wouldn't? Gather evidence for your answer.

Horror and gothic literature

1. Research the basic tenets of the horror genre and make a list. See if you can identify these tropes in other books/movies/TV shows you've come across. What scared you most?
2. Identify similar tropes present within *What We All Saw*. For instance, some of these might include:
 - nightmares
 - an abandoned house
 - a local legend
 - sinister scraping sounds
 - a supernatural circus
3. Make a list of how the author *uses* these tropes, but also how he *subverts* them or shows them to be not true or not as the character or reader had believed them to be.
4. Write a story that incorporates some or all these elements you have uncovered. It can be the beginning of a story describing the setting, an ending, an extract, or a full short story. Up to you!
5. Research 'gothic fiction' or 'gothic literature' and compare *What We All Saw* to other works of gothic fiction you have read or seen. What do you think the differences are between 'horror' and 'gothic' stories?



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

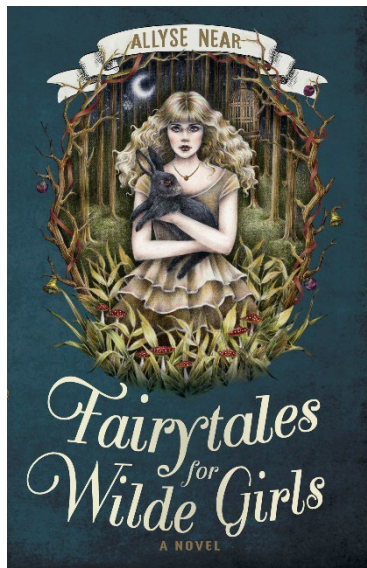


House of Hollow
by Krystal Sutherland

Iris Hollow and her two older sisters are unquestionably strange. Ever since they disappeared on a suburban street in Scotland as children only to return a month later with no memory of what happened to them, odd, eerie occurrences seem to follow in their wake.

But now, ten years later, seventeen-year-old Iris Hollow is doing all she can to fit in and graduate high school on time – something her two famously glamorous globe-trotting older sisters, Grey and Vivi, never managed to do. But when Grey goes missing without a trace, leaving behind bizarre clues as to what might have happened, Iris and Vivi are left to trace her last few days.

Teachers' notes available.



Fairytale for Wilde Girls
by Allyse Near

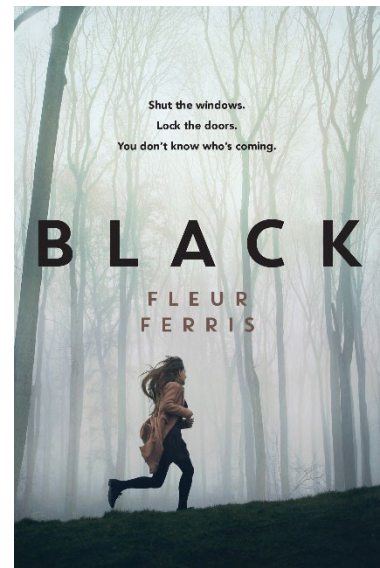
There's a dead girl in a birdcage in the woods. That's not unusual. Isola Wilde sees a lot of things other people don't. But when the girl appears at Isola's window, her every word a threat, Isola needs help.

Her real-life friends – Grape, James and new boy Edgar – make her forget for a while. And her brother-princes – magical creatures seemingly lifted from the pages of the French fairytales Isola idolises – will protect her with all the fierce love they possess.

It may not be enough.

Isola needs to uncover the truth behind the dead girl's demise . . . before the ghost steals Isola's last breath.

Teachers' notes available.



Black
by Fleur Ferris

Ebony Marshall is in her final year of high school. Five months, two weeks and four days . . . She can't wait to leave the town where she's known only as 'Black'. Because of her name, of course. But for another reason, too.

Everyone says Black Marshall is cursed.

Three of her best friends have died in tragic accidents. After Oscar, the whispers started. Now she's used to being on her own. It's easier that way.

But when her date for the formal ends up in intensive care, something in quiet little Dainsfield starts to stir. Old secrets are revealed and terrifying new dangers emerge.

If only Black could put all the pieces together, she could work out who her real enemies are. Should she run for her life, or stay and fight?

Teachers' notes available.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
What We All Saw	Mike Lucas	9781761045936	8-12	\$19.99		
House of Hollow	Krystal Sutherland	9780143796992	8-12	\$19.99		
Fairytales for Wilde Girls	Allyse Near	9781742758510	10-12	\$22.99		
Black	Fleur Ferris	9781925324976	8-12	\$19.99		
TOTAL						

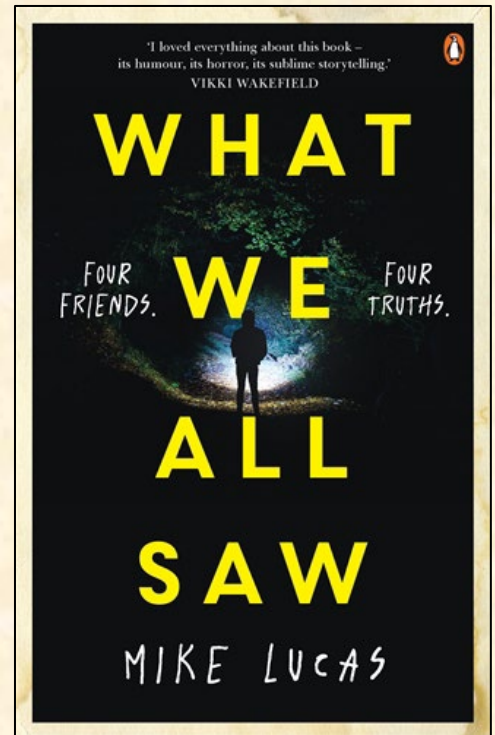
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READING GROUP QUESTIONS

Four friends experience something supernatural, something terrifying, in the wood one summer. But what did they *really* see? Exploring truth versus belief, real versus unreal, folklore versus fact, and the power of story to change our perceptions, there's *so* much to talk about after reading *What We All Saw*. Here are some questions to get you started.



1. What do *you* believe happened? What was explained . . . and what remained a mystery?
2. What does the novel have to say about the power of storytelling to influence our perceptions? How do Charlie's and Mr Grant's stories affect what the other characters think and believe?
3. What techniques do Charlie and Mr Grant use to keep their listeners interested? Does the author use some of the same storytelling techniques? (Hint: Consider how pauses, distractions, cliffhangers, surprise, foreshadowing and conflict raise tension and intrigue.)
4. Think about the title – *What We All Saw* – and how the story plays with the motif of 'seeing' and 'sight' and the five senses. What do each of the four friends see, hear, smell, taste and touch that become relevant to working out the 'truth'? How do their senses mislead versus help them?
5. *Witches only exist in stories. Everyone knows that. But what if the stories are real?* How are witches portrayed in popular culture, and how were so-called witches treated in the past? What different beliefs about witches have societies held, and what was the result? Are any of the stories about witches real?
6. What does *What We All Saw* have to say about how we treat people who are considered different? Which characters become scapegoats in the story, and why? Where can you see this kind of groupthink and scapegoating playing out in the world today?
7. Did the tragedy and mystery that summer bring the friends together, or highlight their differences? Did you think the four friends would stay together when they went to high school? Why or why not?
8. What tropes of the horror, fairytale or thriller genres does the author use? (Hint: an abandoned house, a local legend, a supernatural circus, nightmares, sinister scraping sounds, witches and more!) How does the author *use* these tropes, and how does he *challenge* them?
9. What has changed for children between the 1970s and now? Could *What We All Saw* be set now? How would the story be different?
10. Why do you think the author chose to use the framing device of an adult looking back at childhood? Did it affect your reading of the story? What other books or films have you read or seen that use this device?
11. Mike Lucas wrote *What We All Saw* while recovering from eye surgery. Why do we write or read stories about trauma or tragedy? How do such stories increase our empathy and help us process our own emotions?

FOUR FRIENDS. FOUR TRUTHS. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?