



TEACHERS' RESOURCES



Don't Let Them Leave Mike Lucas

PLOT SUMMARY

Ghosts aren't real and houses can't come to life. Charlotte knows these facts to be true.

Yet when Charlotte and her siblings are orphaned and sent to live with their grandmother on remote Black Island, she begins to realise that only one thing is certain: they shouldn't be there.

But will they ever be able to leave?

A compelling and spooky thriller in the best classic ghost story tradition. Inspired by Stephen King, Mike Lucas is a modern master of suspense.

RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 12+ (Year 7 and up)

CONTENTS

1. Plot summary	1
2. About the author	2
3. Author's inspiration	2
4. Pre-reading questions	3
5. Writing style	3
6. Key study topics	3-5
7. Further reading	6
8. Order form	7

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A suspenseful and chilling read that will stay with you long after you turn the final page.
- Consider how the author creates character, dramatic events and setting through evocative description and language.

THEMES

- Loss
- Legends, folklore and the power of storytelling
- The value of redemption

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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Don't Let Them Leave by Mike Lucas

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Lucas is an author of picture books and young adult novels. His YA fiction has been shortlisted for the Readings Book Prize, CBCA Book of the Year Awards and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. His picture book *Where is Cheeky Monster?* won the 2025 Speech Pathology Award for children from birth to 3 years. Mike presents writing and poetry workshops at schools, owns a bookshop in Blackwood, South Australia, and works as a full-time engineer. He has very little time to sleep, but often thinks up a poem or two while he does.



Photo by Deb Smith

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

The spark for *Don't Let Them Leave* came to me one day while I was walking my dog, Holly. It arrived in the form of two sentences:

Our grandmother's house was over three hundred years old. Just a little less than the age of our grandmother herself.

As has been the way with all my novels, I knew nothing about the protagonists' backgrounds, or where they were headed, until I started to write.

Within the first few sentences, I was in the presence of three children who were sitting in a solicitor's office in 1930 London, shortly after the tragic death of their parents. I discovered their names and their ages; the cause of their parents' death and the fact that they were being sent away to live with a grandmother they didn't know existed. And soon (it was inevitable, I suppose, seeing as I spent most of my life living in the South West of England) I found out that their grandmother's house was in Cornwall.

I also wanted this story to be my scariest yet – gothic undertones and horror tropes mixed in with Cornish folklore. I wanted a mystery that even I wouldn't be able to unravel until the story was almost over. And I wanted three very different authentic characters who reacted realistically to whatever surprises were thrown at them.

Much of my research was around the history of Cornish mining, and I was surprised to learn that some mines went out over a mile beneath the sea of North Cornwall. I also read up on Cornish myths and legends and the first Duke of Cornwall, Edward of Woodstock, also known as the Black Prince.

My writing process is simply to write. I make few notes, research as I go and spill words onto my computer screen as they come into my head. Sometimes what I write doesn't work, and so I delete the last few paragraphs or pages and save the file as a new version – just in case I want to go back to that older one. For the first draft, I don't care about polish. I just build the story. I write mostly at weekends because, like many writers, I have another full-time job.

Don't Let Them Leave combines classic horror elements with an original story, and explores themes of loss, revenge and redemption. And, as with my other books, it builds upon a fear of the unknown, and asks the question of how much truth there is to folklore.

I hope you enjoy it. Alone. By candlelight.



PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the cover of *Don't Let Them Leave*. Based on the title and the illustrations, what do you think the book is about? Where do you think it might be set? Can you identify what the book's genres (like fantasy, action, crime) are?
2. Now, read the blurb and add to your ideas about what the story might be about and the concepts it might explore. What elements capture your interest?
3. Have a go at writing a paragraph predicting what you think will happen in the story. Then, once you have finished reading the book, re-read your paragraph and see if you were close. You might like to swap your answer with the person next to you and see what they thought would happen too. Which version do you like better?

WRITING STYLE

Narrative Structure

Don't Let Them Leave begins with a prologue – an introductory chapter – set in 1855. It tells the story of an unnamed young boy being sent to investigate a strange tapping sound inside a mine in North Cornwall.

The rest of the story is set in 1930, and is focused on Charlotte. The connection between the two parts doesn't become clear until later on in the book.

Questions and activities

1. Why do you think the author included this prologue? Did you find the end of the prologue chilling? At what point or points of the story does the relevance of this prologue become clear to you? What happens in the climax and ending of the story to make this chapter relevant?
2. What other books have you read that feature a prologue or first chapter that is set at a different time or place to the rest of the story? Are there certain genres of story that use this technique more often? Do you think this is an effective way to start a story? Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of prologue.

Perspective

There are two different perspectives used in *Don't Let Them Leave*. The prologue uses limited third-person perspective – the narrator only knows the thoughts and motivations of the unnamed boy, not the other characters in the story.

The boy took a few seconds to understand what he meant. When he did, he began to back away. He was used to crawling through tight spaces, but something about this terrified him. (Page 4)

The rest of the story is written in first-person, from Charlotte's point of view. We are seeing and experiencing the story through her.

I was beginning to sweat. I wiped my hand on my dress. Felt the onset of panic. No, not the onset. It had been there a while. It was just threatening to take control. (Page 354)

Questions and activities

1. Why do you think the author chose to use third-person for the prologue and first-person for the rest of the book?
2. Choose a first-person passage from the book and rewrite it in third-person. What are the biggest differences between the two? Does one have more impact than the other?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Genre Study: Horror and Gothic Fiction

'Genre' means the style or type of story. *Don't Let Them Leave* can be categorised as gothic horror. Horror stories are intended to frighten the reader. And in the subgenre of gothic horror, they do this with an emphasis on atmosphere and themes such as the supernatural and the dark side of human nature.

Gothic fiction first emerged in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a reaction against rationalism (the belief that reason, rather than emotion, should be the basis of all actions and decisions). In gothic fiction, authors explore powerful emotions and things that cannot be explained by reason or logic. Two of the most famous gothic horror



stories are *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker.

Tropes that often feature in gothic fiction include:

- ghosts, vampires or other supernatural beings
- wild or remote landscapes
- mystery, terror and suspense
- derelict or abandoned buildings
- symbolic use of weather to reflect the characters' emotional state or the presence of danger and volatility
- an innocent heroine threatened by evil.

Questions and activities

1. Research the basic tenets of horror 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 *Don't Let Them Leave*. For instance, some of these might include:
 - nightmares
 - an abandoned house
 - a local legend
 - sinister animals
 - vengeful spirits
3. Choose one of these tropes and write a paragraph about how the author uses it.
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. Compare *Don't Let Them Leave* to other works of gothic fiction you have read or seen (this can include TV shows and movies).

Folklore

Don't Let Them Leave is set in Cornwall, a place which is rich in folklore and mythology. Mike Lucas

has incorporated some real folklore into the story, such as the Knockers – little people who lived in the mines, either making mischief, warning miners about impending collapses or alerting them to buried riches.

The author has also taken inspiration from Cornwall's many legends about giants to create one of his own: Bostdreggen.

Questions and activities

1. Research Cornish folklore. Choose one of the stories and write your own version of it.
2. Why do you think the author chose to invent his own Cornish giant rather than using one of the legends that already exist?
3. Can you think of any other books or movies that incorporate real folklore or mythology?

Imagery and Symbolism

Don't Let Them Leave is layered with metaphor, symbolism and imagery. Here are two examples, but there are many more symbols and recurring images to be found within the book.

Ravens

In many cultures, ravens are said to represent death, or to act as messengers between the mortal world and the gods. Their presence is often seen as an omen.

Quotes:

There was nobody else here. No grandmother waiting. Just a large raven sitting upon a post, staring at us. Like the one at the window of Mr Frankelweiss's office. And at the funeral, I couldn't help thinking. Weren't they connected to death in some way? (page 71)

A boom of thunder, and a terrifying caw. And a raven, that raven, launched itself from the eaves, barely visible against all that was black. It was blown in every direction, its wings flapping against the surging gusts and



torrential downpour, but it forced its way south, toward the mainland.

*No doubt with a warning to whoever needed to know. **The Montague children are escaping!** (page 291)*

‘Did you send the ravens to find the others?’

‘Me and the island.’

‘The island sent the ravens?’ It was almost laughable. No, it was far from that.

‘The ravens are the island.’ (page 360)

Mining

It’s not surprising that a book set in Cornwall should feature mining, as there has been mining in the area since around 2100 BCE. But in *Don’t Let Them Leave* it also has symbolic meaning. It can represent things that are hidden, dark or dangerous; or be a metaphor for inner exploration. It can remind us that, below the surface, things may be much deeper and more complex than they appear.

Quotes:

He saw the end of the tunnel, where the rock fell away into blackness beyond. What was hiding in that blackness? Not hiding. It wanted to be found. Why else would it be making that noise?

Tap. Tap. Tap. (Prologue, page 5)

I didn’t know much about mining. Only that it was how most of the metals were brought to the surface. I’d heard stories about horses living their whole lives in darkness. From birth to death, never once seeing the light. Or feeling the warmth of the sun. Or even knowing anything but cold rock, dirty air and hard graft. (page 48)

‘So my father invested his money on going down below the sea. Most of the miners were from Pendoon, and they were sceptical at first. Sceptical and scared. Which was strange. They were content with working

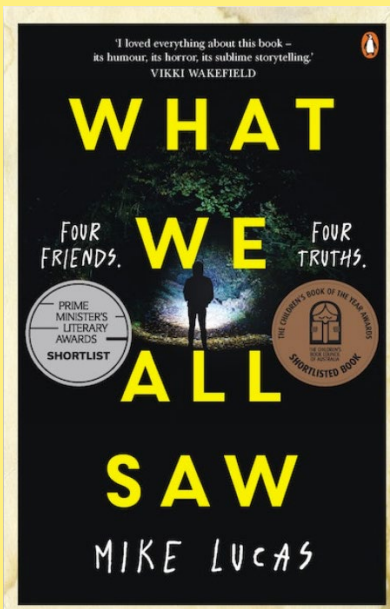
below hundreds of tonnes of rock and soil, but when water was over their heads, water they had fished for centuries, they were more reticent to go down into that hole.’ (Mr Northmore, page 228)

Questions and activities

1. Find other mentions of the ravens in the story. Are they neutral descriptions or do they add to the mood or tone of the scene?
2. Could the mines be a metaphor for other themes of the story – for instance, the way Pendoon’s secrets have been ‘buried’ until Charlotte uncovers them?
3. What other symbols or imagery can you identify in the book?



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



What We All Saw by Mike Lucas

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

If you wander into the wood ...

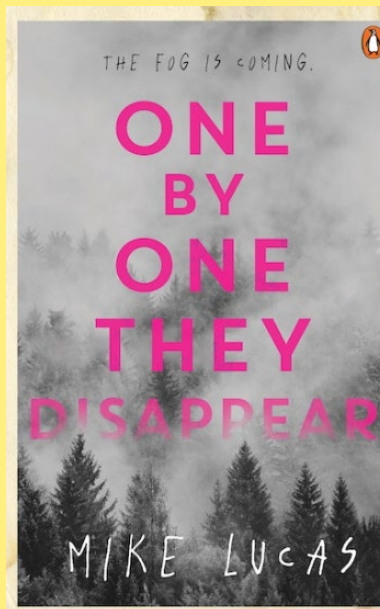
If you hear scratching sounds from the Old Quarry ...

If you go too close to the edge ...

WATCH. OUT.

A thrilling tale of suspense for fans of Stranger Things.

Teachers' resources available.



One by One They Disappear by Mike Lucas

The fog is coming . . .

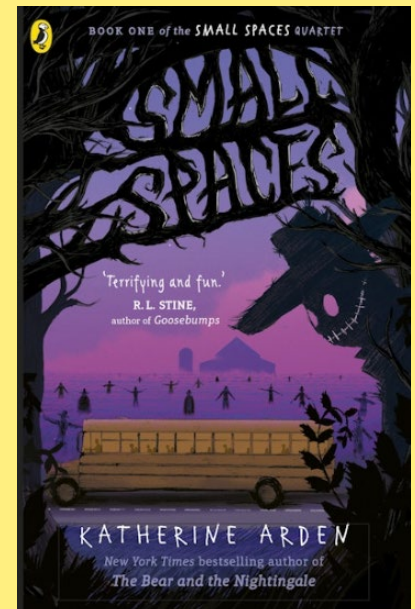
One girl. Two identities. Three friends.

One disappears. One forgets. One remembers.

There is truth in every tale . . . Find it!

A frighteningly creepy supernatural YA thriller that chills to the bone.

Teachers' resources available.



Small Spaces by Katherine Arden

'Don't panic. That's the first rule of survival. Never panic.' Simple enough – until your school trip turns into a waking nightmare.

After she rescues a book from the river, Ollie discovers an unsettling ghost story about the Smiling Man, a fiendish trickster who'll grant any wish for a price. Creepy, but just a story . . . right?

The spellbindingly creepy middle grade debut of bestselling author Katherine Arden.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
<i>Don't Let Them Leave</i>	Mike Lucas	9781761355462	7-12	\$19.99		
<i>What We All Saw</i>	Mike Lucas	9781761045936	7-12	\$19.99		
<i>One by One They Disappear</i>	Mike Lucas	9781761049866	7-12	\$19.99		
<i>Small Spaces</i>	Katherine Arden	9780241795071	5-8	\$19.99		
TOTAL						

<p>NAME: _____</p> <p>SCHOOL: _____</p> <p>ADDRESS: _____</p> <p>STATE: _____</p> <p>POSTCODE: _____</p> <p>TEL: _____</p> <p>EMAIL: _____</p> <p>ACCOUNT NO.: _____</p> <p>PURCHASE ORDER NO.: _____</p>	<p>PLEASE SEND ORDER FORMS TO YOUR LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPLIER.</p>
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