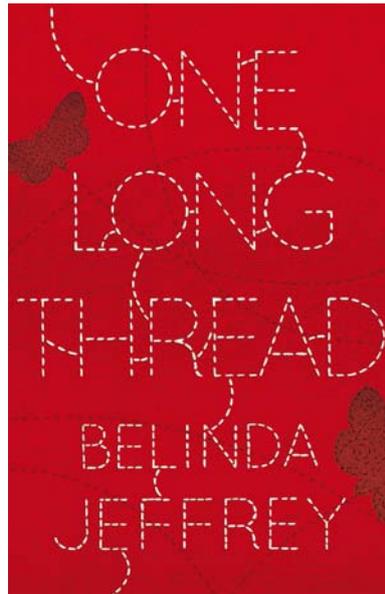


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

# ONE LONG THREAD

## Belinda Jeffrey



### Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising secondary teacher

ISBN: 9780 7022 3892 5 / AU\$19.95

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Identity and Belonging	2
Religion	3
Grief	3
Love and Relationships	3
Author Motivation	3
Study Notes	4
Adjunct for students who have also read <i>Brown Skin Blue</i>	7
About the Author	7

## UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

**SYNOPSIS**

*One Long Thread* follows on from Belinda Jeffrey's acclaimed novel *Brown Skin Blue*, with the narrative taking shape after a tragic accident involving Sally, one of the main characters. A few characters in *Brown Skin Blue* re-appear in *One Long Thread*, although this story focuses largely on Ruby, Sally's twin sister. Students do not need to have an in-depth knowledge of *Brown Skin Blue* to engage with *One Long Thread*, although the reading of both will give students greater scope to analyse characters.

*One Long Thread* explores many human emotions that are rites of passage in everyone's life at some stage. Ruby, the first-person narrator, must navigate many trials in her life, as she slowly develops and understands her identity, despite her family's shattered past. Although many of the circumstances that define Ruby's life are extreme, young readers can empathise with the basic emotions explored in the story.

Ruby's mother is lured into a religious cult and subsequently leaves. Ruby's twin sister Sally is sent to live in Darwin with their mother, while Ruby stays in Melbourne with her father. The distance, as well as the different personas of the identical twins, places a wedge in their relationship that eventually sees Ruby and Sally lose regular touch with each other.

While Ruby battles to find herself without Sally in her life, she receives the tragic news that Sally is in a coma and that her unborn baby will not survive. Ruby travels to Darwin and is confronted by her mother's life in the cult, as well as the grief of losing her identical twin sister. During the course of the novel readers follow Ruby's journey through the stages of grief and see her forge new relationships in a bid to move on and form her own identity.

To rebuild her life, Ruby slowly searches her family's past and, with a little help from the people in her life, pursues her own dreams of becoming a fashion designer. Due to the first-person narrative, Ruby's internal monologue gives insight into the deep emotions and confusion that tragedy can bring, but also shows the healing process on a personal level.

*One Long Thread* explores many issues in a way that will stimulate classroom discussion. Identity and belonging, grief, religion, and love and relationships are all poignant themes in the novel.

**THEMES****Identity and belonging**

- Ruby's personal struggle with her own identity, when compared to her more adventurous twin Sally, is a major focus throughout the novel.

## UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- The repercussions of Ruby's parents' divorce make her question her place in the family.
- Ruby's mother's need for belonging drives her into joining a religious cult.
- Ruby attempts to gain answers to her family's past in order to develop a stronger understanding of herself.
- Pearl, Ruby's grandmother, spent her life looking for belonging until finally settling in Tonga.

**Religion**

- The transformation of Ruby's mother after joining the Aberdeen is discussed by characters in the novel.
- Sally's inability to talk to her mother about her pregnancy drove her away.
- To be married within the Aberdeen, Ruby's mother had to renounce any affiliation with her former life, including her daughters and mother.

**Grief**

- When Ruby and Sally's parents divorced, each girl coped with the grief differently.
- The death of Sally shows readers Ruby's, and her father's, journey through the grieving process.
- Ruby's mother's devotion to the Aberdeen and subsequent renouncement of her family causes more grief for Ruby but through her experience with her sister's death earlier in the novel, makes it easier for her to cope.

**Love and relationships**

- Ruby's discomfort with the thought of boys is quickly changed when she meets Barry (a character first introduced in *Brown Skin Blue*), even though their meeting was a result of traumatic circumstances.
- The context of Barry and Ruby's relationship creates some moral dilemmas for the two.
- Ruby's father starts a new relationship with Amona after his divorce.
- Ruby's mother marries within the Aberdeen; however, her role in the community is questioned by Ruby.
- Mr Grandy mentors Ruby, helping her to reach her potential.

**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

In 2008 I drove to Bundaberg Writers Festival to meet with a literary agent in the hope of getting published. I had no idea that events on the drive home would inspire my third novel, *One Long Thread*.



## UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

Driving home, I began telling my friend, who was driving with me, about my grandmother, who I had not seen for many years. I had last heard that she was running a caravan park in Hervey Bay. My friend turned off the highway and when I asked what she was doing, said, 'We're going to track down your grandmother.'

The first caravan park I called was at Scarness. There was a pause. 'Jeez,' said the man who answered. 'That would make me your uncle. Mum would love to see you. She has leukaemia.'

I knocked on the door of her small unit. A woman came to the door. 'I know who you are,' she said. 'I know exactly who you are. I've been waiting for someone to come and find me.'

In her lounge room surrounded by her many craft projects, her oxygen tank and photograph albums, she began telling me some of the stories of her life. She had been forced to leave her children and my grandfather when my father was ten. She apologised to me that day, saying she felt so bad for leaving, but she had feared for her life if she stayed.

I asked about her parents. 'I know almost nothing about them,' she said. 'They had no room for kindness. I found out I was pregnant at fifteen. My mother took my only winter coat, which was beige, and dyed it bright red. She gave me a small suitcase and put me on a train to marry your grandfather.'

Sometime after her funeral, I was playing with ideas for a novel when a friend asked why I didn't write about girls. I had no answer. I had been toying with a story about another boy, but her question made me think. The first thing that came to mind was a generation of women, all inevitably linked, and the story of that red coat, which begins this novel.

**- Belinda Jeffrey**

### STUDY NOTES

- At the beginning of the novel, Pearl was sent away to have her baby when she became pregnant. Do you think this would happen in modern times? Why do you think things have changed?
- Have a 'nature versus nurture' debate about Ruby and Sally, specifically looking at personal development. Outline your thoughts on 'nature versus nurture' by putting your ideas into a table like the one below.

Arguments for nature	Arguments for nurture

## UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- Use evidence from the novel to respond to the statement: 'A person's environment defines their development more than their genetic makeup.' You can agree or disagree with the statement.
- Ruby mentions experiments on twins conducted by the Nazis at Auschwitz. Do some research on Dr Mengele. What ethical issues come into play with his experimentation techniques?
- Even when Sally and Ruby lived together, Ruby was confused about her identity. Is this normal for a young person or is the fact that Ruby was a twin a contributing factor to her insecurity? Discuss.
- What do you think of the list of rules outlined by Ruby's mother in Chapter 2? How reasonable do you think these rules are in our modern society?
- Sally had sex in the car park after sneaking out when she was 13. Is this too young to have sex? Do you think that her mother's rules may have contributed to this decision? Give reasons to support your ideas.
- Divorce in contemporary society is far more common than in previous generations. Look at the Australian Bureau of Statistics website below, particularly the number of marriages and divorces on subsequent links, as well as at the general length of marriages before divorce.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3310.0>

What implications do these figures have for children in broken families? Is divorce now seen as a natural part of life? Why do you think that these rates have risen so much considering divorce rates in the 1960s were just below 10%?

- Explain how Ruby's parents' divorce affected her. Should children, especially twins, be split up and moved so far away from each other following a divorce?
- Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross explained grief as a set of five stages to help people understand their emotions.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross\\_model](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model)

Track Ruby's emotions and behaviour after Sally's death and map them onto the Kubler-Ross model of grief. Do you think that Ruby's responses

## UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

were typical or atypical? Does understanding the process of grief enable someone to deal with loss more effectively?

- What defines a cult? Do you think there is such a thing as a religious cult? What makes a religion and a religious cult different? Look at some of the following websites to help formulate an opinion.

<http://listverse.com/2007/09/15/top-10-cults/>

[http://www.sullivan-county.com/news/fundie\\_cults/index.htm](http://www.sullivan-county.com/news/fundie_cults/index.htm)

[http://www.helium.com/debates/439981-is-christianity-one-big-cult/side\\_by\\_side](http://www.helium.com/debates/439981-is-christianity-one-big-cult/side_by_side)

Should you take everything written on these websites as the truth? Is the information on these websites objective or subjective? Which website do you think is most helpful? Explain why.

- What are some of the key features of the Aberdeen that make characters in the novel refer to it as a cult? Do you think it is a cult? Discuss your reasoning.
- Why do you think Ruby's mother was attracted to the Aberdeen in the first place?
- What was the role of women in the Aberdeen? Do you agree with this differentiation in gender roles?
- Tongan culture is very different to Western cultures in countries like Australia. Do some research, as well as referring to the book, and make a list of differences.
- Why do you think the author included Tonga in the story-line? What did Pearl find in Tonga that she couldn't find in Australia?
- Ruby and Barry's relationship in the novel is complicated. Why is this so? Should Ruby have been so careful or apprehensive about their relationship? Do you think she is betraying her twin Sally?
- The fashion and design motif is a large part of the novel. How does the author use this motif to tie into the emotions Ruby deals with? Would

## UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

Ruby have worked through her grief so effectively without her love of design? Is it important to have creative interests in your life?

- Mr Grandy functioned as Ruby's mentor and confidant. How important is it to have someone external to your family like Mr Grandy to succeed in your chosen pursuits?
- Finally, what is the significance of the novel's title *One Long Thread*? Explain your ideas. (Hint: It may be a metaphor.) How does the 'Wedding Dress in Red' link to this?

**ADJUNCT FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE ALSO READ *BROWN SKIN BLUE***

- Do you think Sally's behaviour in *Brown Skin Blue* aligned with the overview of her given by Ruby's narration throughout *One Long Thread*? Did Sally lead a double life or was her persona consistent in both circumstances? Were we aware of Sally's mother's influence on Sally in *Brown Skin Blue*?
- In *Brown Skin Blue*, Barry was the feature character. Is his personality featured much in *One Long Thread*? Explain your reasoning, as well as the author's possible motivations, in your opinion.
- Do you think that Barry has taken control of his life in *One Long Thread*?
- Finally, do you think that reading *Brown Skin Blue* has given you a better understanding of *One Long Thread*? Write an extended response using evidence from both books to substantiate your opinion.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Belinda Jeffrey is the author of the much acclaimed novels *Brown Skin Blue* and *Big River, Little Fish*. Her short story, 'The Hallelujah Roof', was also published in the *One Book, Many Brisbanes* anthology. She has been shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award, the Queensland Premier's Award and the Western Australian Premier's Award.