

Genre: Mystery/suspense/horror

**Readership:** Upper primary, lower secondary

**Themes:** Key themes, Change, Conflict, Friendship, Loyalty, Courage, Fear, Guilt, Death, Grief, Family, Fate

**Other books by this author:**  
The Cursed, The Immortal,  
The Legends Series,  
The Anniversary Legends

## **The Vanishings**

**By Michael Panckridge**

### **Setting**

Batesford, a small country town in Victoria, Australia

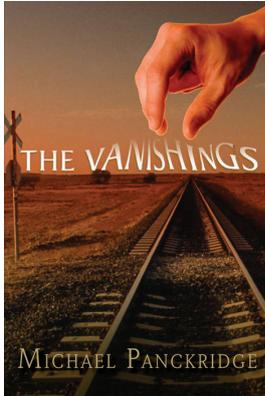
### **About The Vanishings**

Fran's twin sister, Carli has vanished and everyone assumes that she has run away. Fran isn't sure. She knows that Carli hated moving to Batesford as much as she did. She has a nagging feeling that her sister's disappearance has something to do with the fight that they had. As the novel progresses, however, she begins to suspect that Carli did not run. She was taken.

When there is a sighting of Carli in Langford, Fran's parents leave her under the care of her aunt Mary while they go to investigate. Aunt Mary means well but she is a little odd. She sleeps in the afternoon. Fran is alone. It seems that the only friend she has is Sherpa, her dog. Together they begin to investigate Carli's disappearance.

When the unscheduled train passes through the derelict Batesford Station, Fran is sure that she sees frightened faces on board. She knows that the train is connected to Carli's disappearance and she must solve the mystery and confront the Guardian in order to save her sister.

The Vanishings provides an opportunity for students to explore the themes of change, courage, friendship, family, grief and death. The suspenseful narrative provides an excellent opportunity for readers to study the plot structure and language techniques of horror and suspense. The slowly unfolding mystery encourages students to become active readers and predict outcomes.



## English

### Reading and writing

#### Pre reading activities

- Study the front cover of *The Vanishings*. Make some predications about the events of the story.
- Read the book's blurb and add to your predictions.
- *The Vanishings* is a suspenseful story that follows Fran on her journey to save her sister, Carli. Write a journal entry about someone with whom you have a special connection. This might be a family member or a friend. (You could also write about a pet. Fran's faithful companion throughout the story is her dog, Sherpa.)
- Write a journal entry about a time when you have been afraid. What did you do to overcome your fear?

#### Reading activities

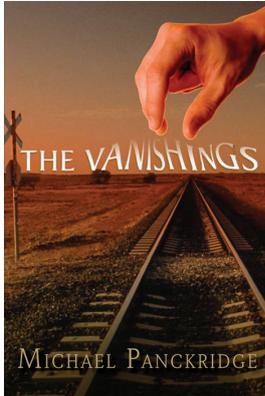
As you read the novel, complete the chapter activities outlined below.

#### Chapter 1

- The loft is Fran's secret place. Write a journal entry describing a place that is important to you.

#### Chapter 2

- Fran comments that Aunt Mary is odd. What things do you find odd about her? Would you feel safe in her care?



### **Chapter 3**

- Draw the part of this chapter that is the most exciting or scary. If you don't like to draw, use an old newspaper to cut out pictures to symbolise the scariest part.

### **Chapter 4**

- Design a poster to inform the community about the reasons teenagers might run away. Locate some real help groups and put this information on your poster.

### **Chapter 5**

- Discuss some of the ways the author has used description to create suspense in this chapter.

### **Chapter 6**

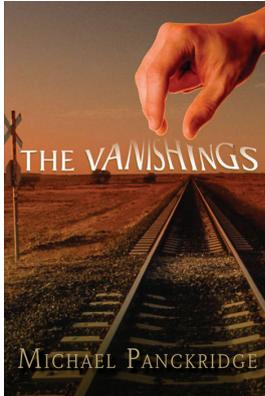
- Make a list of questions that you have at this point in the text. As a class, try to answer at least some of these questions.

### **Chapter 7**

- Aunt Mary can't see the people in the station house. Fran must save Carli. Make a list of Fran's positive and negative qualities. Give examples from the text to prove the points on your list.

### **Chapter 8**

- The importance of the toy track is revealed in this chapter. What is it?



### **Chapter 9**

- What do you learn about the Kelly family in this chapter?

### **Chapter 10**

- Make some predictions about who the Guardian might be.

### **Chapter 11**

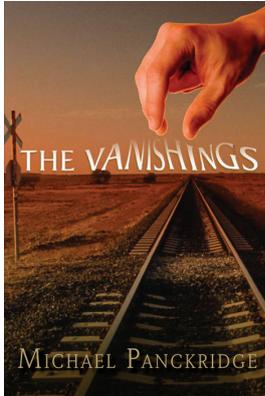
- 'Maybe you're not alive or dead yet,' Sefton comments about Fran. Can people be alive but live as though they are dead? In what ways is Fran dead? In what ways does she prove herself to be very much alive?

### **Chapter 12**

- Fran decides it is important to confront her fears and deal with a situation in this chapter. Write a journal entry describing a time when you have confronted your fears.
- Discuss what you have learnt so far in the text about Carli. What are some of her key qualities?

### **Chapters 13 and 14**

- The train is described in great detail in this chapter. Draw a picture to show what it looks like.
- What part of the mystery is solved in these chapters?
- In what ways were Carli and Fran not happy with their 'real' world before Carli vanished?



### **Chapter 15**

- As a class discuss the Haunted children on the train. What do you find to be the most frightening thing about them?

### **Chapter 16**

- Sherpa is a good friend to Fran. Share some stories about your pets and how they can give you comfort.
- What important discovery does Fran make in this chapter?

### **Chapter 17**

- We find out why the Haunted are on the train in this chapter.
- As a class, discuss the reasons why.
- What do you learn about Sefton and his mother in this chapter?
- Make a list of questions that you have after reading this chapter.

### **Chapter 18**

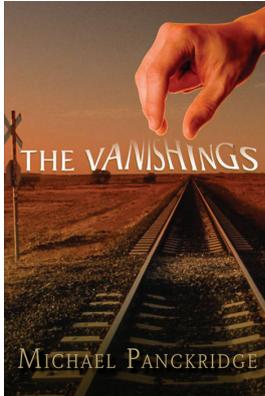
- Discuss what the word 'fate' means. Fran believes that she controls her fate. Do you believe that you can control your fate?

### **Chapters 19 and 20**

- Draw a picture of the most exciting part of these chapters.

### **Chapter 21**

- How does Michael Panckridge make the desert seem vivid and real for the reader?



### **Chapter 22**

- Write a journal entry describing what it might be like living in the Land of Shadows.

### **Chapter 23**

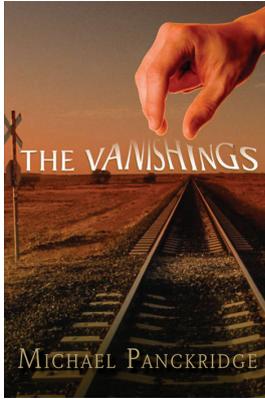
- Write the conversation between Fran and Carli. What things might Fran say to her sister?

### **Post reading activities**

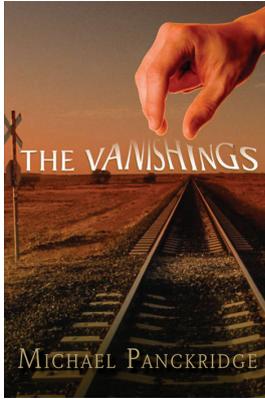
#### Vocabulary

In groups, choose four words from the list below.

- Find the meanings of these words.
- Create a four minute performance to convey the meaning of these words to the class. You will need to show the word to the class but do not tell them the meaning. Have them guess!
- After your performance make sure the class understands the meaning of your words.
- The chart below will help you organise your information.



Word	Page	Definition	Action
Loft	2		
Skittered	5		
Plaintive	8		
Raucous	8		
Notoriety	20		
Sherpa	50		
Barren	24		
Copse	36		
Intricate	38		
Rustic	41		
Denounced	41		
Impassively	62		
Reverently	74		
Replica	85		
Mortality	91		
Incoherent	101		
Menacing	119		
Fate	125		
Impenetrable	133		
Erratic	135		



**Structure**

- Construct a timeline to show the order of important events in The Vanishings. You might like to represent the events using pictures or symbols.
- As a class, discuss the narrative structure of the novel. (Exposition, problem, conflict, rising conflict, resolution.)
- As a class, discuss the narrative structure of a short story. Create some symbols to show the most important things to include in a short story.

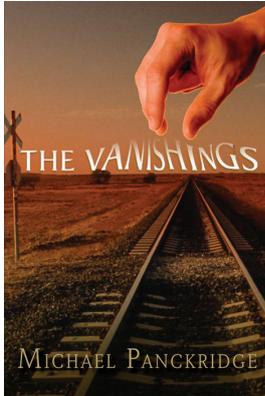
**Themes**

- Allocate small groups one major theme in the novel. (Some suggested themes are listed at the beginning of these notes.) Have students make a list of events and words that relate to their theme.

**Characters**

- Complete the table below. Note, although for most of the text Fran and Carli’s parents are not at home, they still have positive and negative characteristics. For example, is it responsible for them to leave Fran alone and not call to talk to her?

Character	Plus (Pos. characteristics)	Minus ( Neg. characteristics)	Interesting (Characteristics that caught your attention)	Similarities (Note experiences or traits that characters share)
Fran				
Carli				
Bill Hughes				
Aunt Mary				
Fran’s mum & dad				
The Guardian				
Sefton				



At the end of the novel, Fran has learnt many things. Write a journal entry as Fran, describing her response to the events.

### **Language**

Metaphors, similes and symbols

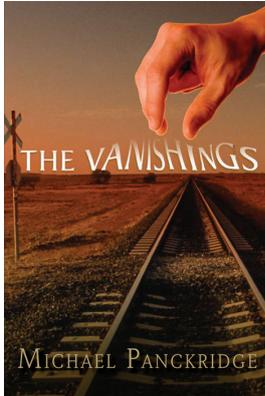
Michael Panckridge uses interesting similes, metaphors and symbols throughout his novel.

- Define the term metaphor.
- Define the term simile.
- Define the term symbol.
- Find some examples of similes, metaphors and symbols in the book.
- Discuss how birds are used as symbols in the book.
- Discuss the symbolism of the train.
- Create some new similes and symbols for fear.

Michael Panckridge successfully creates a feeling of suspense in the novel. How does he do this? Discuss things such as sentence length, concrete images, use of adjectives and use of dialogue.

### **WRITING ACTIVITIES**

- Write your own story about a ghost. Use the short story structure that you discussed earlier in the section on plot. Use some techniques to create suspense.
- Adopt the role of an investigative reporter. Write a newspaper article explaining what really happened at the Batesford train station.
- Write a story from Carli's perspective. What might have happened to her in the Land of Shadows?
- Fran is a very brave character. Write your own story about a character who must confront a fear in order to save a friend.



### **Speaking and listening**

- Find some examples of ghost stories and ghost poems. Read them as a class. Discuss some common features of this genre.
- On page 91 the conductor comments that, ‘...most people are very aware of their mortality and very prepared for death.’ Fran disagrees. She feels that, ‘No one’s ready for death. No one wants to die.’ As a class, discuss these two comments. Perhaps both of them are, in part, true?
- ‘Am I dead now? she wondered. Isn’t that what the Guardian meant? When the world around you ceases to be the one you remember. The one you know.’ (p.138) Discuss ways that people can live as though they are dead. Discuss some of the things that Fran learns about the importance of home.

### **SOSE/HISE**

Batesford is a real place in Australia.

- Find out where it is and draw a map of the state.
- Mark in the capital city of this state and the surrounding towns. Mark in the closest river.
- Include a border, title, northing, key and scale on your map.
- In pairs, produce a tourist pamphlet to provide newcomers with some information about the town’s main attractions, industry and history.

### **SCIENCE**

In chapter 21, Fran wakes in the desert. ‘Apart from the odd thorny shrub, there was nothing to see but rust-brown dirt and sand.’

(p.137)

- Research one danger that Fran might face in the Australian desert. This might be an animal, plant or an impact of the climate.
- Create a fact file on this danger.
- Include at least one way that Fran could protect herself against this danger.



### **CREATIVE ARTS**

In groups, perform a scene from one of your ghost stories. Use props and sound effects to heighten the suspense! In order to organise your group, allocate members with tasks. For example you will need a costume designer, script editor, director, and of course, the actors.

As a group, perform one of your ghostly poems, or the poem Ghost House by Robert Frost.

Turn The Vanishings into a graphic novel. Create a series of pictures to show the most important part of the action. Use some speech bubbles to include important dialogue.



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Michael Panckridge is the author of the acclaimed Legends and Anniversary Legends series. These series are a culmination of many years of dedicated sports mania combined with an enthusiastic exploration of what boys and girls really want to read.

Michael Panckridge enjoys talking to children, parents and teachers about reading and writing — and especially boys about reading.

Michael is a teacher at Geelong College and has been working there for 12 years. He is pretty mad-keen on sport. He has played cricket, football, soccer, tennis, hockey, golf. He also collects sporting things. He has a massive collection of football cards and lots of cricket books too.