

Study Guide *The Edge of Limits*

***The Edge of Limits* with its compelling characters, moving and powerful scenes takes you on the never-to-be-forgotten ride of your life that can change you.**

Gervay's novel is deceptively moving and powerful, all the characters richly drawn and her description of camp life so realistic you feel you are living it. Highly recommended.

Good Reading Magazine

The sensational new book, *The Edge of Limits* is a...compelling, confronting and important book that examines what it means to be young and male in the 21st Century.

Queensland Booksellers

In the tradition of Lord of the Flies, Susanne Gervay's *The Edge of Limits* looks at the dynamics in a group of boys on an eight day survival camp." Sunday Herald Sun

The Edge of Limits It feels like an authentic trip into an adolescent mind .. refreshingly honest and beautifully written." *The Sydney Morning Herald*

... clear, evocative and powerful ... This is a novel which needed to be written and needs to be read. *Reading Time*

- **Powerful storyline**
- **Youth culture**
- **Young adults confronting consent**
- **Boys confronting consent.**
- **Universal themes – mateship, love, courage, consent**
- **Challenging, Confronting, Contemporary, Relevant**

The Edge of Limits is a gritty story of courage and hope ... Gervay takes us on a journey, eight days' camping with the hero Knox and his mates including Fat George, Bennie and Jones, and the evil Watts.

This journey was eight days of descending into fear, exhaustion, ravines and rivers, each in their own way carving out a sense of self-knowing and mateship; eight days of reverie where past and present ghosts comfort and perplex. Ultimately, in *The Edge of Limits*, Knox comes to a sense of responsibility and authenticity that is more powerful than the mystery of the Rave Party or Watts metal tip leather boots. ... Gervay compels us, like the river that is part of her story, towards the rancid final place of initiation. This ... goes right to the heart of young males in modern society.

Carole Kayrooz PhD, Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Canberra

The Edge of Limits is a journey oscillating between the city culture of rave dances, beach parties, body piercing, football, girls, nipple piercing and the vast wilderness of the Great Dividing Range with its powerful physical challenges of hard trekking, abseiling, rock climbing, white water rafting and there are the flies, thousands of them and the freezing nights and the sweaty days.

Against these backdrops, *The Edge of Limits* exposes male culture as young men search for their place in the world today. It explores mateship, leadership, male humour and the way they speak, or don't speak. It's about girls – getting them, discarding them, wanting them, love. However, ultimately *The Edge of Limits* reveals the underbelly of peer group pressure and male capacity for violence and courage.

It's eight days without showers, with the "long-drop", sleeping on rocks, working out how to survive the camp. It's tough when Spano weasels out of doing anything, but there's pay back. There are other guys like Fat George who are just slow but sensitive. Watts has it in for him. Bennie has the runs and stinks. Guys hate him. Sam doesn't.

There are scenes of exhaustion as everyone collapses after the chimney rock climb. Hilarious scenes at the kangaroo attack and leech invasion. Rough humour as Robbo and Andrew go for each other in the physics lab. There are times of reflection overlooking the valleys and scenes of Sam's relationship with Laura. Ultimately the camp winds towards *The Edge of Limits* and the final place of initiation where Jones cracks and real leadership is exposed. Ultimately the camp winds towards The Rave, the rape and Sam's decision of courage.

Research: Readability, Innovation, Knowledge and Discovery

There was extensive research prior to and during the process of writing the novel. The 'editor' was my son who gave me authenticity. This research involved books, internet, interviews, newspaper clippings, videos, music, interviews, engaging from trekking to facing a leech invasion, and my professional experience in Child Growth & Development. It was a total immersion and covers:-

- Consent from both male and female perspective
- Sexuality
- Identity
- Peer group pressure
- Leadership
- Communication
- Mateship
- Outdoor programmes ranging from Outward Bound, Duke of Edinburgh Awards to Sport and Recreation camps
- Extreme sports such as caving, rock climbing, canoeing.
- Youth culture including rave parties, magic mushrooms, drugs, alcohol, football.
- Airforce
- Death

- Stages of grief and acceptance
- The mountains:-
 - Flora and fauna
 - Wildlife
 - Landscape
 - Wilderness tracks
 - Birds
 - Weather conditions

What was the motivation for writing *The Edge of Limits*?

We all have to choose our battles. *The Edge of Limits* is the battle of CONSENT.

Growing up as the child of refugees, my parents went through terrorism and war. Weapons of war included horrific acts against women. My father rarely told the stories of war, but there was one I never forgot. In forced labour, my father didn't know he was a hero. I knew. He enabled the escape of a Russian grandmother and her little daughter from 'a tool of war', rape. Despite the atrocities of the past, my parents always had the spirit of survival and building a new life. It left me with the legacy of seeking justice. CONSENT is a battle that underpins so much of my writing like *Shadows of Olives Trees* which goes to the heart of girls and women fighting for equality or my younger *I Am Jack* books which goes to the heart of school bullying.

We continue to be shocked at the grammar schools, catholic colleges, state schools, universities, the culture of the 'boys' clubs'. Government campaigns now advocate 'respect'. Endless academic papers on gender equity proliferate. Schools have CONSENT programs and tick the boxes. Books on 'safe' behaviours appear in bucketloads. We have the voices of young women like the Australian of the Year, Grace Tame and Chantal Contos' 7000 testimonies from girls who shared their abuse experiences. The media is filled with the victims of abuse and the abusers. These victims deserve to be heard.

However if we seek change the status quo, we have to include boys. *The Edge of Limits* goes into new territory. It challenges young men to become critical thinkers to consider their actions and consequences. It challenges girls to understand them.

SO LET'S GET REAL.

The Edge of Limits is powerful story reaching young adults/teens and adults who are prepared to go into the journey. Only then will there be change. Not for everyone, but in enough girls and enough boys, so they stand together.

The rape and murder of the Leigh Leigh in 1989 still stands as a monumental moment of violence against girls.

The murder of Leigh Leigh, was at a 16-year-old boy's birthday party at Stockton Beach, New South Wales. The 14-year-old girl from Fern Bay was assaulted by a group of boys after she returned distressed from being raped by a 15 year old boy. After being kicked and spat on by the boys, Leigh left the party. Her naked body was found in the sand dunes nearby the following morning.

As an educator specialising in child growth and development, I recognise that during adolescence, the area of the brain responsible for reasoning, planning, and problem solving, is developing, which when coupled with the hormonal surge of puberty can lead to impulsive and negative behaviour especially for boys. It is essential that boys and girls talk. That they engage in real story and critical thinking. *The Edge of Limits* challenges young adults to make decisions that matter especially in consent.

Characters

The characters in *The Edge of Limits* are realistic, inviting identification. The boys include characters from the “heroic” Jones to “Fat George”, all of whom are part of that journey of survival and change.

The boys:- Sam Knox, Fat George, Peter Jones, Spano, Bennie, Luke, Con, Andrew, Watts, Robbo

Girls:- Laura, Annie, Sam’s mother, the girls caught in the ‘games’ the boys play.

Camp leaders/teacher:- Sarah and Seaten.

Influencers:- Grandpa, the Navigator, Laura, Sam’s mother, Annie

Each character had significant dilemmas to face.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does climbing mountains and forging streams prove?
2. Tall, athletic, intelligent, superhero Peter Jones seems the obvious leader. He expects girls to ‘fall’ for him. What is real leadership?
3. Hormones are out of control. How do boys deal with sexuality? With girls? What are their different attitudes to girls? Sam, Peter Jones, Watts, Andrew, Robbo?
4. How does Sam cope with his grandfather’s death? How do adolescents deal with death? Can they talk about it? How do they grieve? Accept? Hide their feelings? Do they have to confront it alone?

5. What is true courage? Are there different types of courage and/or different ways to show it?
6. Why is sport so important to boys? Is it important to girls? Does it test leadership, courage, group dynamics, power?
7. Can a person survive alone? Do they need the group or part of a group?
8. What are the dynamics of male group politics? How does a female like Sarah, influence it?
9. Boys often don't elaborate when they speak to each other. There are usually jokes, sarcasm and bravado. How is it different to female communication?
10. How do males and female communicate with authority such as their parents and teachers? Do parents and teachers communicate differently with them?
11. Why persecute the weakest person? Are Fat George and Bennie vulnerable to attack?
12. How can ordinary boys turn to pack violence? What happens to Annie?
13. What is war? How does it make heroes?
14. The depersonalisation of women is challenged. Women/girls are not objects. Boys/men place themselves in their shoes to find the outcome.
15. Peer group behaviour especially when fuelled by alcohol and testosterone can have dire consequences.
16. Young love can be beautiful, challenging, overwhelming. It can be destructive, selfish, a way to 'big-note' yourself in a peer group. It can leave devastation. Love is complex and needs complex discussion.
17. Boys need to read 'The Edge of Limits' to understand their critical choices. Girls need to read it too, so that understand the drivers for male action. Then questions and discussion will come.
18. *The Edge of Limits* a game-changer.

References:-

‘Respect Matters’ Australian Curriculum

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections/portfolios/respectmatters/>

‘Consent’ Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People

<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation-resources/consent>

The legal age for consensual sex varies between 16 and 17 years across Australian state and territory jurisdictions. Full details: <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/age-consent-laws-australia>

‘What is Consent?’ Kids Helpline <https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/what-consent>

‘What is Consent?’ Queensland Police Service

<https://www.police.qld.gov.au/units/victims-of-crime/support-for-victims-of-crime/adult-sexualassault/what-is-consent>

‘Your Guide to Sexual Consent’ healthline <https://www.healthline.com/health/guide-to-consent>

BIO

Awarded the Lifetime Social Justice Literature Award for her books by the International Literacy Association, an Order of Australia for literature, nominated for the Astrid Ingrid Memorial Award 2020, Susanne Gervay is published both nationally and internationally. She is an award winning short story writer, published in many literary journals and anthologies alongside Sir Salman Rushdie and David Malouf. Her passion is children’s and young adult literature.

[Education MA \(UTS\), MEd \(UNSW\), Dip Ed, BA \(Sydney Uni\).](#)

Awards and Recognition:-

- Lifetime Social Justice Literature Award for Children’s Literature by the International Literacy Association
- Order of Australia for literature
- Nominated for Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award 2023, for Australia.
- Lady Cutler Award for Distinguished Services to Children’s Literature
- Award of Excellence for Services to the Arts, University of Technology Sydney
- Outstanding Youth Literature on Disability, IBBY for YA novel ‘Butterflies’

- She has 17 published titles predominantly that include Heroes of the Secret Underground, Butterflies, I Am Jack books (4), Shadows of Olive Trees, That's Why I Wrote this Song and others.
- Awards, short listings, notables for her books from many organisations including The Society of Women Writers, Children's Book Council Australia, The Australian Family Therapists' Award for Children's Literature, Children's Peace Literature Award.
- Her books are widely endorsed by organisations including, Variety the children's charity, The Cancer Council, Life Education, The Alannah & Madeline Foundation, The Children's Hospital, (Westmead), Courage to Care, anti-bullying organisations in Australia and the US.
- The *I Am Jack* books have become rite-of-passage on school bullying adapted into an acclaimed play by Monkey Baa Theatre, touring multiple times, Australian and US theatres.
- Her books have been published in the USA and translated into a number of languages such as Turkish, Bahasa, Korean, Slovenian, Rumanian and distributed in English speaking countries by HarperCollins 360.
- Ambassadorial Roles include – Ambassador for the Premiers Reading Challenge NSW, Patron of Monkey Baa Theatre, former Chair of the board of Writing NSW, Role Model for Books in Homes, Writing Ambassador for Room to Read, former President of the Society of Women Writers, Regional Advisor of the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators ANZ, literacy ambassador for many campaigns over the years.
- Festival director of literary festivals

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