

## TROPPO

MADELAINE DICKIE

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YEAR LEVEL: Y11+

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia; Sustainability

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Black magic, big waves and mad Aussie expats.*

In Indonesia, Penny is drifting, partying, hanging out – a thousand miles away from claustrophobic Perth and her career-minded boyfriend. But things take a dangerous turn when she goes to work at Shane's Sumatran Oasis. Caught up in the hostility directed at Shane, and flirting and surfing with the hell-man Matt, Penny soon finds herself swept into a world where two very different cultures must collide.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Madelaine Dickie studied Creative Arts and Journalism at the University of Wollongong. In 2011 she received a Prime Minister's Australia Asia Endeavour Award to move to West Java, Indonesia, and complete her first novel. As part of this award, she worked with mentors at Universitas Padjadjaran and Universitas Islam Bandung. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications including *GriffithREVIEW* (2013), the American journal *Creative Nonfiction* (2012) and *Hecate* (2010). Her radio stories have been broadcast on Radio National and she also writes and rides for the surfboard company Treehouse Landscapes and Handshapes.

### THEMES

- Travel and tourism
- Indonesian culture
- Multiculturalism
- Exploitation
- Racism
- Poverty
- Corruption
- The rise of fundamental Islam in Indonesia
- Surfing
- Religion and spirituality
- Australia's relationship with Indonesia and Indonesians

### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y11–12 English

Y11–12 Literature

Y11–12 Modern History

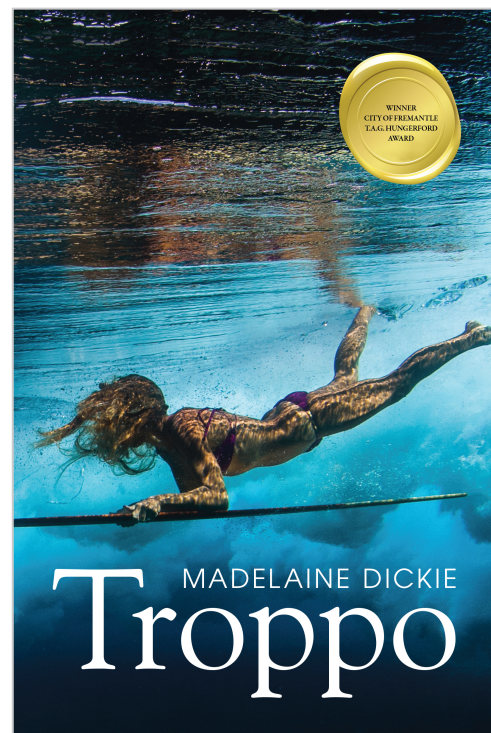
Y11–12 WACE Language study: Indonesian

Y11–12 WACE Religion and Life

Y11–12 WACE Philosophy and Ethics

### USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: <http://www.madelainedickie.com>
- Author's Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/madelainetroppo>



## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### Discussion questions

1. What is your first impression of the narrator, Penny? Her boyfriend claims she has '*no goals, no drive*'. (p. 217) Do you think it is fair to assume that Penny does not have any goals? What do her passions, motivations and dreams appear to be?
2. *I am certain Matt's a hell-man, one of those characters who'll be talked about across the archipelago for years to come.* (p. 143) What is a 'hell-man'? Use five adjectives to describe the character Matt (provide examples from the text in which he demonstrates these characteristics).
3. How does the author build suspense (and a sense of foreboding) prior to the introduction of the character Shane? What is your reaction upon meeting him?
4. Compare and contrast the beliefs, values and attitudes displayed by the following individuals in the novel: Penny, Josh, Ibu Ayu, Matt, Shane, Kristi, Cahyati, Franz, Adalie, Marika, Rick.
5. What does the phrase 'gone troppo' mean? Why do you think 'Tropo' was chosen as the title?
6. *Tropo is set two years after the Bali bombings, a year after the bombing outside the JW Marriott Hotel, and two months after the bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta* (Interview with Madelaine Dickie). Why do you think a knowledge of context is important when reading this book?
  - a. What is Jemaah Islamiyah?
  - b. How is the rise of fundamental Islam in Indonesia depicted in this novel?
  - c. '*Me personally? I think mosque, church, temple, this is Indonesia, ya? Many people, many religions, why not?*' (p. 181) What do you think are some of the biggest challenges for multicultural societies such as those found in Indonesia and Australia?
7. Using a Venn diagram, brainstorm ways in which Indonesian culture is represented as being both similar and different to Australian culture throughout *Tropo* (e.g. female dress codes).
8. Create a definition for the term 'intercultural understanding'. Why is it important to cultivate mutual respect between different cultures? Which characters in the novel display this respect? Which do not? Find examples to support your claims.
9. *Is this what it takes, to soften indoctrination in the hearts of radicals, to remember our shared humanity?* (p. 258) Why do you think it can take a tragedy for people to set aside their differences?
10. *Should a tsunami hit Batu Batur, would Shane be out there with his neighbours, clearing the debris, lifting bodies out of the mud?* (p. 258) Answer Penny's question, using your knowledge of the character Shane so far.
11. How is the character Penny similar/different at the beginning and end of the novel? Which experiences do you think have prompted her growth? After reading *Tropo*, did you personally reconsider any of your own beliefs or attitudes? Write a 500-word reflection.

### Debate

In teams of four, have students debate for/against the validity of the following claims/issues raised in the book.

1. *Do dollars speak louder than religion?* (p. 169)
2. *Power, not politics, is the art of controlling your environment.* (p. 174)
3. *As long as corruption continues politically, as long as poverty continues socially, these Islamic groups will get stronger and stronger.* (p. 176)
4. *The mayor of Padang is trying to make a new rule. He wants Christian girls to wear headscarves to school.* (p. 181)
5. *I'm thinking that consumerism, modernity, must be slowly eroding culture, and wonder if it will also erode religion.* (p. 195)
6. *It's not really our place to change it. We don't live here. It's not our culture.* (p. 101)

### Essay questions

1. How does Madelaine Dickie construct the relationship of Australians to Indonesia and Indonesians in *Tropo*?
2. '*Australians think they own Bali!*' (p. 252) Critically analyse explorations of inequality and exploitation in *Tropo*.
3. Compare and contrast representations of masculinity and femininity as embodied by two or more characters in *Tropo*.

4. *It's funny, you always think of the other as being in relation to yourself. You never imagine that you could be that other.* (p. 42) How does the process of 'othering' impact upon each of the central characters in *Troppo*?
5. *I understand him; understand the discord of dual belonging.* (p. 46) How do each of the characters struggle with the issues of personal and cultural identity, belonging and tolerance?
6. How does Madelaine Dickie use symbolism in her construction of the setting? In what ways is the setting representative of the characters that inhabit it?
7. Critically analyse the representation of one or more of the following themes in *Troppo*: racism, multiculturalism, poverty, corruption, spirituality.

## Creative writing

1. Using one of the following quotes as inspiration, create a short story of 1000–2000 words.
  - a. *There's something intoxicating about living in extreme places, among extreme people. You never, for a moment, forget that you are alive.* (p. 255)
  - b. *Moral reluctance battles curiosity. Curiosity wins.* (p. 143)
2. Madelaine Dickie says, *The texture of Troppo is very true, the intoxicating smell of kretek cigarettes, the nights bleary on Bintang beer, and the way the call to prayer from the mosques drift down through mountain valleys.* When writing your own short story for your chosen prompt above, experiment with creating imagery incorporating the five senses: visual (sight), auditory (sound), kinaesthetic (touch), olfactory (smell) and gustatory (taste), to create a powerful atmosphere and sense of place.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

***Troppo is a book that explores the relationship of Australians to Indonesia and Indonesians. Was this one of your motivations in writing the novel?***

I've spent a lot of time travelling and living in Indonesia and wanted to articulate the allure, the charm, what it is that keeps pulling me, and so many other Australians, back to Indonesia. I also wanted to write something mythic about surfing in Indonesia. I wanted to write about the hell men who surf heaving reefs alone, about waxing your board with the first call to prayer from the mosque, about the grizzled old surfers, who, with a certain amount of beer, might talk in low voices about black magic. They might tell you that one night, in a lonely seaside losmen, they were strangled awake by something not seen, only felt. Mythic, of a time that's swiftly disappearing, or has disappeared.

***Why did you choose to set Troppo at the end of 2004? Do you think that the Australian–Indonesian relationship has changed in the last decade?***

I hoped that by writing *Troppo* I'd be able to extract Indonesia from my heart, from under my skin. Wouldn't feel so obsessively drawn back. It hasn't worked. Every time I land in Bali, take that first breath of humid, incense-soft air, I break into goosebumps. Every time I travel somewhere else, I find myself comparing the place to Indo. Dominican Republic? Surf's way more fickle than in Indo. Panama? Food's nowhere as good as in Indo. Namibia? The people are so aloof – nothing like the Indos!

***Is it fair to say that some elements of Troppo are autobiographical? In what way did this book stem from your own experiences as a traveller and surfer?***

Some of the anecdotes are almost true, certainly stemming from my own experiences as a traveller and surfer. In Sumatra, I heard of a body boarder from the Canary Islands who scraped her nipples off surfing a slab; this happens in my book to the Kiwi. The texture of *Troppo* is also very true, the intoxicating smell of kretek cigarettes, the nights bleary on Bintang beer, and the way the call to prayer from the mosques drift down through mountain valleys. This said, the characters are entirely fictional, and were you to search for Batu Batur along the coastline of mainland Sumatra, you wouldn't find it.

## ***Dare I ask whether Shane is based on a real individual?***

Shane's a composite of several mongrel expats I met in Tonga, Vanuatu, Mozambique and Indonesia. He also has a few characteristics and stories stolen from people I like very much!

## ***What impact has winning the City of Fremantle T.A.G. Hungerford Award had on your writing career?***

Now that I've got a book published, I can tell people, without shame: I'm a writer.

## ***What is next for Madelaine Dickie?***

I've just moved to Wyndham, in the far north of Western Australia. I'm living in an open-air house and the view from my writing desk is of a mudflat. The Cambridge Gulf and Balangarra country stretches beyond the mangroves. The mozzies are bad, and in March this year, the temperature hit forty degrees Celsius by 11 am every day. There's also not much happening in Wyndham – the abattoir has shut down, the croc farm has shut down, and the pub has just shut down. Still, it's so austere and beautiful, and I get a wild thrill thinking about the potential stories here ... So far it's been a great place to work on my next book!

## **GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK**

ada apa?	what's the matter?
ada orang gila	there is a crazy person
ada perempuan di atas	there's a woman up there
ada susu	is there milk?
aduh	oh no!
alis mata	eyebrows
ambil itu	take it
angin	wind
anjing	dog
apa lagi?	what else?
arak	any of various spirits distilled in certain Arab and Asian countries from toddy, rice, molasses, or other materials
ayo	let's go
ayo pulang	let's go home
bajingan	bastard
bak mandi	a tub used to hold water for bathing
bakso	bowl of meatball soup
banyak duit	lots of money
bapak, pak	father (honorific term)
becak	pedicab
bebas	free
begini ya	it's like this
beginilah saja	that's just how it is
bencong	ladyboy
berapa	how many / how much
bihun goreng	fried vermicelli noodles
bisa	you can
bisa saya bantu?	can I help you?
bodoh	stupid, idiot
bodoh banget	really stupid
boleh makan dulu?	can we eat first?
boleh minta	may I have
bu	honorific term for a married female
buat semua?	for everyone?
bukan	no, not
bukalah pintu ini	open this door

## GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK (CONTINUED)

bule	foreigner, particularly Caucasian
Cahyati mau pulang kampung	Cahyati wants to go home to the village
cepat!	fast!
dan	and
dangdut	a genre of Indonesian music
dari mana?	where are you from?
dimana	where
dingin	cold
dokar	horse-drawn cart
dua kopi hitam	two black coffees
dua ribu	two thousand
duduk	sit
dukun	shaman
enak	tasty
'gak [nggak] begitu	not really, not like that
'gitu	really, like that; short for <i>begitu</i>
hantu	ghosts
hati-hati	caution, be careful
ibu	mother
ilmu	science
iya	yes
jadi siapa?	so who ?
jalan-jalan	stroll
jam karet	rubber time
jangan nakal	don't be naughty
kain ikat	cloth belt
kain songket	a kind of woven fabric, silk or cotton
kaki lima	food cart
kan	right?
kamar mandi	bathroom
kan?	right?
kasih ke saya	give it to me (slang)
keagamaan apa?	what is your religion?
kebaya	blouse
keluar	get outside
ke mana	where?
kecantikan	beauty
kenapa?	why?
kenapa kamu disini?	why are you here?
kenapa kesana?	why there?
kerupuk	crackers
kok mahal?	why is it so expensive?
kok ribut sekali?	how come it's so noisy?
kopi hitam	black coffee
kretek	Indonesian clove cigarette
kris	short sword or dagger with wavy blade
kamu oke	you okay?
kasihtahu aja, ya, kalau mau bantuan	let me know, yeah, if you want help
kenapa kamu nggak mau sarapan?	why you don't want breakfast?
lagi	again, more
laki-laki	boy, male
lebih baik	better
lewat sini	this way
lima menit lagi	five more minutes
losmen	budget accommodation



## GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK (CONTINUED)

madrasah	college for Islamic instruction
maaf	sorry
maaf sekali	[I'm] so sorry
maaf ya	sorry, yeah
malam ini	tonight
mandi lagi	wash again!
masak!	no way!, really? (slang)
masih lama?	will it still be a while?
mau apa	what do you want?
mau ke mana?	where are you going?
mau kopi?	do you want coffee?
mau minum apa	what do you want to drink?
mau pisang goreng	do you want banana fritters?
mie goreng	fried noodles
nakal	naughty
nasi campur	a scoop of rice accompanied by small portions of meat/vegetables
nasi goreng	fried rice
nasi goreng ayam	chicken fried rice
nenek	grandmother
nggak	no (slang)
nggak apa	no worries
ojek	motorcycle taxi
oleh-oleh	souvenir
orang	person
orang gila	crazy person
orang lain	other people, outsider, not from here
pacarmu masih di kampung?	your boyfriend is still in the village?
pagi bu	morning, madam
pagi pagi benar	early in the morning
pak	sir
pasar	market
permisi	excuse me
pisang goreng	fried banana fritters
punya berapa saudara?	how many siblings do you have?
pusing	dizzy, headache
rokok	cigarette
rumah makan	restaurant
salak	snakefruit
sakit	sick
sayang	sweetheart, honey
selamat sore	good afternoon
sebentar	moment
sekarang, yuk	now, let's go
sendirian	alone
siang	good day
silahkan masuk	please come in
SMP, sekolah menengah pertama	junior secondary school
SMA, sekolah menengah atas	senior secondary school
sore	good afternoon
sudah	already, done
sudah bisa berbahasa Indonesia?	can you speak Indonesian?
sudah diminum	already drunk
sudah mandi?	have you had a wash?
sudah nyampai	[we're] here (slang)
sudah pintar	already clever

## GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK (CONTINUED)

taat	obedient
teh dulu	tea first
tempe	fermented bean curd
tempat tidur terpisah	separate beds
tentu saja	of course
terlambat	late
wartel	manned phone booth; short for <i>warung telepon</i>
warung	small shop / stall
wayang golek	wooden stick puppets
yuk	let's go (slang)

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