



## Six

by Karen Tayleur

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Six* by Karen Tayleur takes the reader into the lives of six teenagers on the brink of adulthood. The story begins where it ends, in the aftermath of a terrible car accident. But something else is lurking behind the apparently normal lives of these Year 12 students. Five of them have found a body in the woods during the summer. When they report it anonymously, the discovery has implications for all of them. Relationships are developing and changing. All of the characters are facing the pressures of Year 12 and the spectre of the future. All of them have secrets and the way in which these are revealed is one of the many engaging features of this novel.

### Teaching the book

*Six* will work well in the classroom. It is short, well written, and packs a considerable punch. The story has a main character in Sarah but the perspective shifts between all six of the characters. These characters are well drawn and vivid. Students will immediately recognize themselves and their classmates in this novel. This can be the basis for a discussion of perspective and the way in which characters are developed in a story. *Six* is an accessible novel that should inspire the students to see the manner in which their own lives form a narrative. There are a number of creative writing possibilities and the book could be used as a starting point for a unit in this area. But the car crash involving the six characters is, sadly, an all too familiar news item and, without using the book to preach, there is also the basis for a discussion of rights and responsibilities here. Friendship and betrayal are important components of the book and could be the subject of some text response work. *Six* is also a novel that could be read aloud in class. Its relative brevity and its episodic structure will hook in even the most reluctant of readers in the classroom. There is no sense in which this is a book for one particular gender. The 'Six' of the title include three boys and three girls. Both groups will find this story compelling and haunting.

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## BEFORE READING

### Class discussion

- What might 'Six' refer to in a novel? What is the effect of this title?
- What does the cover tell us about the book?

### Activity

In small groups choose one of the following to research. Present your findings to the class.

- There have been a number of tragic car accidents involving teenagers over the past few years. Research one of these incidents and make a short presentation to the class. Answer the following in your presentation:
  1. What happened? How many young people were involved?
  2. What was the cause of the accident?
  3. What was the effect on the community?
  4. What was the response of the police and the government?
- What are some of the restrictions on P platers? Are they too restrictive or not restrictive enough. Present your findings and chair a class discussion the subject.
- If you witness a crime, are you compelled to report it? Research the laws surrounding this issue
- What is an 'aura'? Who can see them? What is 'second sight'?

## WHILE READING

### Comprehension Questions and Topics

1. What happens in the prologue? What does the shift worker find?
2. What does Sarah say about the summer before Year 12?
3. What is revealed about Poppy in Chapter 2?
4. Why are Poppy and Sarah invited to Virginia's house?
5. Why does Sarah's mother want Virginia to come to dinner?



6. What does Sarah say about the walk in The Woods?
7. Why do the girls cut through The Woods?
8. Who do they meet in The Woods?
9. What do they find in The Woods?
10. Why don't they immediately call the police?
11. Why does Poppy go back into The Woods?
12. Who makes the anonymous phone call?
13. Describe Sarah's feelings for Finn.
14. How did Sarah meet Poppy?
15. Why did Sarah want to become a doctor?
16. What are Cooper's plans for the future?
17. How does he feel about Virginia?
18. What are his plans for the formal?
19. Why are Sarah and Poppy drifting apart?
20. What is the 'Power' game?
21. Who is Carl and how does Poppy feel about him?
22. Describe some of the pressures felt by Nico.
23. How does Nico's relationship with Poppy begin?
24. What happens in Chapter 13?
25. What has happened to Finn's family?
26. Why is his relationship with Virginia a secret?
27. Why does Virginia agree to go to the formal with Cooper?
28. What does Sarah get for her birthday?
29. Why does Virginia feel that something is wrong on the day of the formal?
30. How does Finn feel about Sarah?



31. What happened to Cooper on the day of the formal?
32. Describe the conversation between Nico and Sarah.
33. What does Sarah find on Finn's phone?
34. What happens to Nico?
35. What does Sarah work out about the day in The Woods?
36. What happens in the car?
37. Why is Sarah not wearing a seatbelt?
38. What happened to Virginia
39. Who committed the murders?
40. Why can't Sarah talk to Poppy?

## AFTER READING

Make a character chart like the following:

Character	Description	Quote
Sarah Lum		
Poppy Harris		
Virginia Sloan		
Finn Cashin		
Jacob Nicholson		
Tom Cooper		
Tamara		
Carl		
Aunt Lili		

## Discussion Questions

1. Which character do you most identify with, and why?
2. Sarah tells a large part of the story. How does this affect our perception of the events in the novel?
3. Is Poppy eccentric or completely mad?



4. What is wrong with Nico? Why is he shaking?
5. What do you think about Cooper?
6. Does Virginia have any redeeming qualities?
7. How does the situation with Finn's father affect him?
8. Were you surprised by the ending? Why or why not?
9. Each character has a secret that has a profound effect on their behaviour. Discuss each character and their secret.

## THE STORY

### Questions

1. How is each character's story told? How does this affect our perception of the character?
2. How does the prologue help to build dramatic tension in the story?
3. What is the difference between Sarah's journal entries and the other sections where she narrates the story?
4. Is there a character that you would like to know more about? Why?
5. At any point, did you ever suspect any of the characters were involved in the murder of the two girls? Why or why not?

### Discussion

All stories are built on problems or conflicts. What are the problems or conflicts in this story? How are they resolved?

### Activity

- In small groups decide on five important turning points in the story.



## Ideas

The following ideas or issues are raised in the story. Find a quote to go along with each:

Secrets

Friendship

Change

Appearances

Responsibility

## Discussion Questions

### Secrets

1. What role do secrets play in the novel?
2. Why do secrets affect people so significantly?
3. What happens when the various secrets in the story are revealed?

### Friendship

1. Why are Sarah and Poppy such good friends at the beginning of the story?
2. Why does their friendship suffer?
3. What does friendship mean to Virginia?
4. Friendship doesn't save Sarah. Will it save any of the others?

### Change

1. What major change does each of the six characters experience in the novel?
2. Sarah feels that Poppy needs to grow up. Is she right?
3. How are the characters changed by finding the body in The Woods?
4. How will the remaining characters change after the funeral?
5. Is change a positive or a negative force in Six?



## Appearances/Perception

1. How does Cooper view his relationship with Virginia?
2. How does Sarah view her relationship with Finn?
3. How is the discovery of the body viewed by the different characters? Why do they have different reactions?
4. Think of instances in the book where a character does not see a situation clearly.
5. When Poppy sees people's 'auras', what is she really seeing?
6. How does the writer remind us of the importance of perception through the structure of the novel?

## Responsibility

1. Sarah wants to call the police as soon as they find the body. Why is she the only one?
2. Which character besides Sarah feels the weight of responsibility for their actions after finding the body? How do you know?
3. All of the characters share some blame for the car accident. Try to identify the role that each of them plays.
4. What does the story tell the reader about responsibility?

## Activities — General

1. Letters:

Write a letter to each of the characters as they begin Year 12. You can't be too specific as in, 'Don't get in Cooper's car', but you can give them advice that might help them to make better decisions.

2. Driving Survey:

Create a survey to determine the attitudes of your classmates to the laws surrounding L and P plates and to driving in general. You may want to use the following model for your questions:



Eg. P platers should not be able to drive a car with more than 4 cylinders.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Present your findings to the class.

### The Formal

Formals and After Parties are a rite of passage in high school but there are dangers. Write a report on these dangers to be presented to the Parents Council at the school. Make 5 recommendations with a view to reducing some of the risks.

### TEXT RESPONSES

#### Creative

1. Write about a time when you were with a group of people and you were pressured to make a decision that went against your better judgement.
2. Write about your best friend. How did you meet? Why are you such good friends?
3. Write a journal entry from each of the surviving characters describing the funeral.
4. Write about the discovery of the body from Cooper's point of view.
5. Write a letter from Finn to his father describing the events in the story.

#### Analytical

1. Though Sarah is in some ways the victim in the story, she also bears some responsibility for the events that took place. Do you agree?
2. Six reminds us that there is no truth, only perceptions. Discuss.
3. Secrets are essential to maintaining one's identity but they can also be destructive. Discuss, in relation to Six.
4. Is the discovery of the body the key event in the story?
5. Though Poppy is her friend, Sarah is essentially alone in the story. Discuss.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Tayleur lives in the hills of the Dandenong Ranges with her husband and two kids who always leave their homework to the last minute. As well as being expert at year seven German and Chinese, she is a writer.

Her kids have helped her tap back into school-age politics; back to a time when there was always a Rose Thornton ready to rain on everybody's parade. When there was always a school bully, a cranky neighbour and an annoying sibling to contend with.

As a child, Karen was a constant audience for her father's boyhood recollections. His stories have grown larger than life over the years. She's not saying he is a liar. But he has been known to bend the truth.