 Past the Shallows

Section Summaries

Notes

Section 1 Page 1

* Note that the loneliness and isolation felt by Harry is mirrored by the setting of the isolated beach.
* Harry is the youngest of the 3 brothers Joe, Miles and Harry. He is different from his brothers because he does not like the sea-we learn later that he suffers from seasickness and is constantly aware of the sea as an alien and frightening force.
* Harry is imaginative, caring and intuitive. Note how on discovery of the midden he intuitively feels the age of the area and has a sense of those who have gone before, and of his own insignificance and mortality. This is a recurring idea throughout the novel, as is the idea of the sea having different moods and being sometimes powerful and threatening.
* Note how this section is largely from Harry’s viewpoint.

Section 2 Page 7

* Note how now the perspective shifts to that of Miles. Miles has to work on the boat with the men.
* Reader intrigue is created through the mention of the drowning of Uncle Nick and the mention of the “night of the crash”. We find out more about both these events gradually as the novel unfolds
* Note how language is used very sparsely and economically –a good example is on page 8 with the description of the death of Uncle Nick.
* Note how on pages 9-10 we get further description of the sea. The sea is personified and described in terms of a person (poetic technique of personification).

Focus Question

Looking at the first 2 sections of the novel, plus the quotation and the prologue at the beginning, what different images of the sea and its moods are presented to the reader?

Section 4 page 23

* The focus now shifts back to Harry.
* Harry is taken to the Regatta in Hobart by his Auntie Jean. He is overjoyed to find a $20 note which enables him to buy gifts for Miles and for his friend Stuart.

Focus Question 2

Looking at the first 3 sections, what information can we piece together about Harry-his personality, his family background and his life?

Section 4 Page 23

* Back at the house Harry’s happiness and enthusiasm is quashed
* What image do we get of Harry’s father?
* Why do we feel sorry for Miles?

Section 5 Page 29

* We hear about the search for abalone and its crucial economic importance to the family.
* The fishing expedition is largely from Miles’ viewpoint
* We are given more detail on the 2 abalone fisherman (Jeff and Martin) who work with Miles’ father.
* Note how the sea is again presented as dangerous and threatening.

Focus Question 3

Favel Parett often writes very sensory descriptions (for example, descriptions which use touch, sound, sight, and so on)

Find and write down five sensory description examples from section 5.

Section 6 Page 35

* The characters of George Fuller and his dog Jake are introduced.
* What do we find out about George?

Section 7 Page 43

* Joe and Miles go surfing. This is a rare time of joy and peace for Miles and note that the description of the ocean reflects this-The ocean was at peace page 45

Focus Question 4

Explain how the sea changes at the end of this section. How does the sea function as a macrocosm? (Macrocosm: a large system (such as the entire universe) that contains many smaller systems)

Section 8 Page 49

* Harry is presented as caring and generous. What sort of impression do we have so far of Miles? In what way/s is he different to Harry?
* Why do you think Harry is so attracted to George’s puppy Jake?

Section 9 Page 51

* On the abalone fishing boat, a shark approaches with disastrous consequences.

Focus Questions 5

How is the concept of violence explored in this section? In your answer, explain some of the violent events and also provide quotations where the language highlights the violence.

Section 10 Page 61

* There is tension again as Harry revisits George and Jake.
* Note the sense of security and comfort he gains from these visits. He “opens up” to George about his life.
* As is often the case in this novel dialogue is minimal.

Section 11 Page 70

* The father is angry about failing to catch any abalone, and goes off to the pub. He leaves Miles to try and moor the boat by himself.
* Note how further information about “the accident” is revealed slowly here and elsewhere in the novel.

Focus Question 6

Explain the contrast between Mr Roberts and the father. What advice does Mr Roberts give to Miles?

Section 12 Page 81

* Note the extreme brevity of this section. Because Parrett is telling her story in an episodic way, some sections can be very brief but still revealing.
* What light does this brief episode cast on the character of Harry?

Section 13 Page 83

* On a visit to Auntie Jean’s, Miles and Harry have a haircut.

Focus Questions 7

Write an analysis of Auntie Jean, basing it on what we know from previous sections as well as what we find out in this particular section. To what extend is she a sympathetic character?

Section 14 Page 89

* Whilst clearing out the shed at Granddad’s house, the boys find the remains of Mum’s car.
* Miles also finds a shark’s tooth down the back seat.

Section 15 Page 95

* On the way to the tip there is another partial memory of the accident.

Section 16 Page 99

* Miles and a boy named Gary Bones fight over the shark’s tooth.
* Note how on page 104 the 2 older brothers quarrel about their mother. They have conflicting theories and ideas about her.

Focus Question 8

This section again explores an aspect of violence. Write about how violence is explored in this novel, using this incident and at least two other examples.

Section 17 Page 105

* The focus again switches to Harry
* Harry reveals to George his seasickness and fear of the sea. There is a rare feeling of happiness and comfort for Harry as he relaxes and overcomes his fear of the sea and learns to disassociate the sea from the act of fishing.

Section 18 Page 113

* The focus is back on Miles and his father.
* Miles is revolted by the thought of working in the cannery
* Violence and recklessness is again explored.

Focus Question 9

What type of a picture has been built up of the father in this novel? What techniques has Parrett used to create the character of the father?

Section 19 Page 117

* Again the relationship between Harry and George is explored.
* What does Harry gain from George? Why do you think George and Jake are so important to Harry?
* It is clear that Harry has no real memory of his mother.

Section 20 Page 123

* 2 people from the Department of Fisheries arrive at the house to question the father about various fishing infringements. Harry is at home alone.

Section 21 Page 127

* Miles goes to granddad’s deserted house. In a flashback he remembers talking to granddad about wood and his desire to make beautiful things from wood like his granddad did.

Section 22 Page 132

* This section explores the joy and exhilaration Miles gets surfing with Joe.
* The mood abruptly changes when Joe again speaks of leaving. How does Miles feel about Joe leaving?

Focus Question 10

Explain the attitude each brother has towards the sea, using a quotation for each one from any section of the novel.

Section 23 Page 139

* Note how the desolation, hunger and lack of comfort in the boys’ home life has been gradually revealed and extended.
* Note also that around this section we are able to work out the exact ages of the boys? Does anything surprise you about their ages as we get to know this?

Section 24 Page 141

* Jeff and dad are drinking heavily. Note the extreme violence that results from this. What does it force the boys to do?
* What are the really hurtful words used by dad towards Harry?

Section 25 Page 149

* Again comfort and sanctuary is sought through George. Note how this brings back a further memory of granddad.

Section 26 Page 155

* Miles’ memory continues and goes into a further memory of the grief over his mother.
* Harry knows intuitively that Joe has left.

Section 27 Page 161

* Miles takes Harry to Stuart’s caravan. What role is he again adopting here? Why does he not want Harry to return back home?

Section 28 Page 165

* Miles returns to the house. An old photograph triggers further memories of his mother.

Focus Question 10

Explain how memory and flashback is used within the novel, using a variety of examples. How does this technique add to the impact of the novel?

Section 29 page 169

* Dad has bought fish and chips for Miles. Why, do you think? Note the palpable tension within the house.

Section 30 page 173

* Why does Harry pretend that he is going home but instead goes to George’s?

Section 31 page 179

* Harry waits for George to come home.

Section 32 page 185

* As Miles drives in the car with his father he has more flashes of memory.
* There is the strong sense of a violent storm approaching-macrocosm.
* Note how the sense of violence and tension is again present.

Section 33 page 191

* Miles persuades a reluctant Harry that he has to stay at home rather than at George’s.

Section 34 page 195

* Harry dreams of the Southern Lights. Why do you think his section is included?

Section 35 page 197

* From this point on the plotline is increasingly violent and confronting.
* Dad forces Harry and Miles to go out in the storm and takes the boat to the furthest islands
* Miles gives the shark’s tooth to Harry.
* The fuel tank is empty and cuts out with near-fatal consequences.

Section 36 page 207

* What does dad do to Harry? Is this an act of anger, revenge, or both?
* The significance of the shark’s tooth starts to be revealed.

Section 37 page 213

* Note the revelation made by the dad.
* Miles attempts to rescue his brother.

Section 38 page 223

* Note that this section has a surreal, almost dreamlike quality. Why do you think it is included?

Section 39 page 225

* Increased tension as Miles almost loses consciousness

Section 40 page 227

* Further flashbacks/memories of the accident

Section 41 page 233

* What has happened to the roles of Miles and Joe?

Section 42 page 238

* Note how past and present merges here. Whose presence do we gain a strong sense of as granddad’s house is revisited?

Section 43 page 245

* Back at Cloudy Bay, the significance of the repeated image/motif of the seahorse is revealed, and the shark’s tooth increases in significance also.
* Note how the narrative structure gains a sense of completion by returning to the events of page 5 on page 248.
* There is a sense of optimism and a new beginning as the words of the prologue are echoed here.

Focus Question 11

Think about the characters of Miles and Joe. Describe them .In what ways are they different and in what ways he same? Why do you think Favel Parrett chooses not to include a point of view from Joe yet involves him quite a lot in the ending of the novel?