

Out Walked Mel

Paula Boock

197 x 130 mm, 80pp, paperback, ISBN 0-9583405-9-5, RRP \$14.95

RESOURCE KIT for use in schools

- Includes:**
- a personal statement by author, Paula Boock
 - chapter-by-chapter approach for classroom study
 - comprehension questions
 - issues for classroom discussion
 - suggestions for activities and projects

This best-selling teenage novel is back, re-issued in a new edition, new jacket, same punchy, popular story. Winner of the 1992 AIM Best First Book Award, *Out Walked Mel* is a success with students throughout New Zealand who identify with the stropy, mixed-up, instantly familiar Mel.

What the critics say:

“Boock’s writing is alive, full of humour and heart, and she has created in Mel a totally believable character.” *The Dominion*

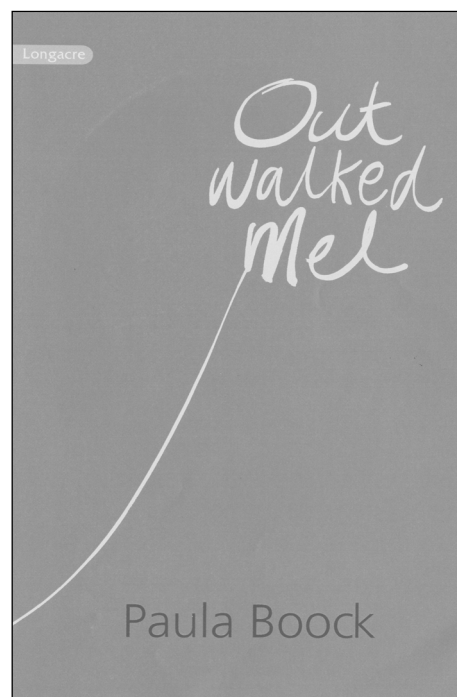
“Boock shows an outstanding talent for dialogue and characterisation... the voice of the short and stropy Mel in her Doc Martens, painfully learning to take responsibility for her life, comes across loud and clear.”

Tessa Duder, *Dominion Sunday Times*

“This contemporary novel is racy, gutsy and... gives a perceptive, compassionate portrait of its main character.” *Listener*

“...as entertaining as *Goodbye Pork Pie* and as serious as *Dick Seddon’s Great Dive*.”

New Zealand Books



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Out Walked Mel

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AUTHOR COMMENT

MEL was the first character I created. I'd written stories and plays before, but I don't think I'd ever really sat down and decided I wanted to write about a particular person. That's what happened with Mel.

I wanted to write something real, something that was tougher and edgier than most of the teenage books I'd been reading. I didn't want to write an adventure – you know, kids unearthing a crime ring, or getting lost in the bush, or discovering a talisman of supernatural power – all those books are a good read, but they assume some outside events have to happen to make your life exciting. I wanted to write about what it is to be sixteen or seventeen and hating the system, hating the way people treat you like a child but expect you to act like an adult. I wanted to write about what it's like never to have visitations from ghosts, just to have to cope with real death; never to outwit a drug ring, just to deal with your boyfriend being wasted when you need him.

So I thought of Mel. I thought about her, where she was at, and why, what was in her past and what she didn't want to deal with. I got her voice, and then I was off. Her voice has been described as a 'sort of wobble' – between bravado and vulnerability, adult and child, and I think I'd agree with that. There were points of the story I knew I was heading towards – the hitch-hiking scene, her father in Christchurch, Benny and the band, Cape Reinga – but I didn't have it all mapped out tightly. The flashback scenes I wrote out of order and just waited for the right time to fit them in. I'm not the sort of writer who throws out three pages for every paragraph I keep. I don't waste much at all, but I do think for a long time before I start writing.

When I read the book now, I still like it. It seems rather episodic, maybe because I wrote it in three hour stints every morning before going to 'work' and I always liked to begin and finish a passage in that time. It also seems a bit raw, a bit strident – but then I think, well, that's Mel, isn't it?

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I've had tons of feedback from readers of *Out Walked Mel*. The best is from people who say they don't read books, but they read *Mel* and enjoyed it. Teachers tell me it's the most nicked book in their school, which I guess is a compliment. Some people have said they don't like the swearing, and that it portrays teenagers as all having sex and taking drugs. Lots of people say it's too short, others that they liked its shortness. Any reaction interests me – I'm sure Mel would have had an opinion too. I had the opportunity when it was re-issued in a new edition to make any changes I wanted, but I didn't change anything. Not because I think it's perfect – far from it – but because once it's been out there for any length of time, I don't think it really belongs to me anymore. It has its own life. It's yours.

Chapter 1

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is the Minister of Education visiting the school? • What is Wai's painting of? • What happens to her painting? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does Mel get angry with the Minister of Education? • Why does Wai get angry with Mel? • Do you think Mel should apologise? Who to? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wai and Mel would like to travel. Pick a country (perhaps one mentioned on p.7) and write an entry in their travel diary for one day there. • Act out the scene in Miss Wardell's art room, including the argument between Mel and Wai afterwards. • Write up the scene with the Minister from Wai's point of view. Describe her thoughts when he asks to hongki. |

Chapter 2

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who does Mel live with, and why? • What did Mel blow her holiday money on? • What is Mel doing when the hoods pick her up? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think Mel feels about living with Davy and Stef? • Mel tells Brian Alexander that she has failed her school exams, then says 'I don't know why I said that.' Why do you think she lied? • Why does Mel get in the car with the hoods? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrate (from the outside or inside) the house Mel lives in with Davy and Stef and the twins in Phoenix Street. • 'Hitch-hiking is a great way to meet people.' Take sides and stage a classroom debate. • Write about a time when you took a risk and then regretted it. |

Chapter 3

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does Mel threaten to do unless they let her out of the car? • How did Mel's mother die? • Where does Mel spend the night? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think would have happened if Mel hadn't got out of the car? • Why does she think of her mother when she does? • How is the voice different in the flashback passage? Why? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write about something that triggers a memory from your childhood. Use the flashback technique in <i>Out Walked Mel</i> to describe both the momentary trigger and the memory. • Act out the scene in the car when Mel makes them let her out. • Survey as many teenagers as you can about their experiences in drink driving situations. How many forced the driver to let them out; how many did not? Collect as much information as you can and present your findings to the class. |

Chapter 4

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Mel get to Christchurch from the farm? • How does Bob make it possible for Mel to go to Auckland? • What word had Mel's mother used to describe Bob? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think Mel feels about her father? • How are Bob's attitudes shown by the author? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob is a vivid character, despite only appearing briefly in <i>Out Walked Mel</i>. Write about a character of your own, describing them in as many ways as you can – by what they wear, where they live, how they speak, what they say and do. • Write about the day out with Mel from Bob's point of view. Try to capture his 'voice' from clues in the book. • Make a poster of Bob – either one illustration of your own, or a combination of images and words that represent Mel's father. |

Chapter 5

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is Mel when she sees the 'baby bimbo' with her father? • Where is Helen living now? • How did Mel's mother leave Bob? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the effect of the passage from <i>The Last of the Wine</i> in this chapter? • Why does Mel say on p.33 that she was 'a bit suspicious about Helen then'? • Why do you think Mel started crying when she and Wai were talking about the future? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Mary Renault's <i>The Last of the Wine</i>. Summarise the book and discuss the way in which Paula Boock has used two excerpts from it in <i>Out Walked Mel</i> (you should also read the passage quoted on p.75). • Wai says to Mel that she's 'made a memory' of the afternoon on the roof. Write about a special moment that you made a memory of. • Write (and maybe perform!) a song of Mel's about either: her father and the bimbo, or: her afternoon with Wai on the roof. |

Chapter 6

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of car does Benny drive? • Who does Benny flat with? • What does Mel find in Benny's drawer? (As well as guitar strings!) |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it that makes Mel suddenly decide Benny isn't like the gang members (p.42)? • Was Benny wrong to assume Mel was going to sleep with him? • When Mel finds the condoms, she decides she will have sex. Do you agree with her? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'You're going to have sex eventually. Why wait?' Take sides and stage a classroom debate. • Survey as many teenagers as you can about whether they've had sex and when (keep names confidential!). Collect your findings in a research assignment and compare your findings with official statistics. • Write a letter to the newspaper objecting to the loose moral values of young people today. |

Chapter 7

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is The Fridge? • Who does Mel see at the end of the tunnel of white? • What is the photograph on Benny's bedroom wall of? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think Mel reacted the way she did to hearing Benny and Rochelle singing together? • What does Mel's vision before she faints signify? • Is Mel being fair or unfair to Benny about sex? What about Benny? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the lyrics of the song 'Black Day', or write your own lyrics to the song 'Thieves'. • Make a video of the night at The Fridge, including the band if possible, and using special effects to depict Mel's vision before she faints. • Mel wishes she could talk to Wai about her and Benny. Write a letter from Mel to Wai about her dilemma. |

Chapter 8

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does Mel do just before going out the door in the morning? • How does she get to Kaitaia? • Who drives the bus to the Cape? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mel leaves rather than deals with situations. Do you agree? Why? • Florence says the reason Mel left school was the argument with Wai. Is that true? • Was what Mel felt at the Cape a sign? Of what? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a letter home from Florence describing her trip to Cape Reinga and meeting Mel. Try to capture Florence's voice. • Write a poem or song by Mel about her experience at Cape Reinga. • How many drink driving accidents are there per year in New Zealand? How many are fatal? What is being done about it? Put together your results in a research assignment. You might like to present it to the class. |

Chapter 9

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| Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is crying on the bus? • What is the passage from <i>The Last of the Wine</i> about? • What have Stef and Davy bought for Mel while she was away? |
| Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think Mel can finally accept the truth about her mother and Helen? • What is the significance of Wai's painting? • What do you think will happen to Mel now? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make your own version of Wai's painting of Mel – use the description on p.79 as a starting point. • Mel says she will get in touch with Helen again. Write a letter Mel sends to her over the summer holidays. • Select key scenes and make a play or a video of <i>Out Walked Mel</i>. |