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| <b>Title:</b><br>The Accident  | <b>Author:</b><br>Kate Hendrick | <b>Recommended Age:</b><br>Year 9-10 |
| <b>About the author:</b>   |                                 |                                      |
| <b>Synopsis:</b><br>Three different stories, three different moments in time, on a collision course with each other. Hendrick weaves a story about grief, memories and coming of age. For each of the three narrators, Sarah, Eliat and Will, life is at a crossroads. Sarah is recovering from a tragic accident, Will is dealing with a dysfunctional family and Eliat is searching for a place she belongs. All are haunted by memories of their past. Kate Hendrick reveals their stories layer by layer as she tackles issues such as teenage pregnancy, drinking, divorce, drug use, promiscuity and death. Her clever use of multiple narratives and the six degrees of separation draws the reader in as the truth falls into place. |                                 |                                      |

## BEFORE READING

1. What is your earliest memory? Write a list of the earliest things you can remember. Which ones can you explain and connect to other aspects of your life, such as family, events, milestones? Consider the things you can't explain or connect. How much of your memory is fragments of unexplained things?
2. Everyone has turning points in their life. They might be marked by a change of house, the arrival of a sibling, a change in their family, illness or an accident. Use a timeline to map out your life and add the key turning points to it. You might choose to do this as a visual timeline and include pictures, or perhaps write a brief reflection for each.

*Extension:* In some ways our lives are like a 'Choose your own adventure'. After completing task two, add another layer to your timelines and imagine what might have been different in your life if the key turning points had not occurred. Write a dual narrative of the two versions of yourself.

## WHILE READING

1. As you read, keep a timeline for each character to help you keep their stories in line. As you did for you own timelines, add key events in their lives. It may help to do this electronically as the events are not always revealed in chronological order.
2. Take note of the references to weather in the novel. When you finish reading, group them into three lists (one for each character). What do the weather references tell you about the characters and their lives? How do they reflect narrative structure?

3. What is the meaning of cathartic? Why do you think Eliat uses this to describe the moment it rains? Are there similar moments for the other characters?
4. After reading the first few chapters, or after your first reading, write down your initial impressions of the novel. What is this novel really about? What message do you think it sets out to convey? What do you find engaging, interesting, confusing? Compare your views with two others in your class. In two columns write down the views that you agree with and those you challenge. List evidence to support the views you agree with. Then see if you can find evidence to change your mind about the views you challenge. You might do this as a group and help to convince others of your own views.

## **AFTER READING**

### **Character**

#### **Sarah**

1. How is Sarah's interest in art and photography used to reflect her view of life and the changes in her life?
2. How has the death of her brother altered the relationship that Sarah has with her family?
3. Sarah describes herself as feeling 'camouflaged'. What do you think she means by this? To what extent is this her own choice? What does she do to create this?
4. Sarah's chapters are titled 'Later' which is a more ambiguous title than Will's 'After' and Eliat's 'Before'. Why do you think the writer has chosen this title for Sarah?
5. Sarah describes her art as 'Technically excellent. Completely soulless.' Page 167. Is this also an accurate description of her?

#### **Will**

1. Explore the way that Morgan's rain-damaged backdrop on Page 13 is symbolic of their lives.
2. In what way does Will carry the weight of the family?
3. Re-read pages 219 to 222. Why do you think Will reacts so emotionally to the demolition of the indoor pool?
4. Will says of his sister Lauren, '...she's not the only protagonist in our story.' Page 176. What does he mean by this?

#### **Eliat**

1. Eliat presents herself as a rebellious, independent teenager who chooses to live on the edge. Is this a true depiction of who she is? Find evidence that both supports and refutes this.

2. Rose-Marie and Terry are critical of Eliat as a mother for Tash. If you were deciding whether Eliat should continue to be Tash's mother, what positive qualities does she have to offer and what negative issues do you see? Write a letter of recommendation supporting or condemning her role as a suitable parent; or you could hold a class debate on the topic.
3. Re-read pages 184 to 185. What does this passage tell us about Eliat's relationships with people around her and why does she 'delete' them from her life?

## Style and Structure

1. Why do you think Hendrick chooses to use multiple first person narratives in this novel? In what way is each distinct?
2. What is the effect of labelling Sarah's chapters as '*Later*', Will's chapters as '*After*' and Eliat's chapters as '*Before*'.
3. Why do you think Hendrick chooses not to tell the stories in chronological order?
4. 'Above me is a leaf dangling by a single spiderweb thread' Page 244. *The Accident* is a novel that is also like a spiderweb held together by threads.
  - In what way are the characters connected?
  - What is Hendrick's purpose in connecting her characters in this way?
  - Create a web diagram that illustrates the connections between characters.

## Themes

### Family

1. *The Accident* depicts three different types of families, all in different states of unrest. What challenges does each family face?
2. In each family unit, who do you see as the strongest and who is the weakest link?  
Individually make a list from strongest to weakest. Then form a group and compare your list with other students. Be prepared to argue your reasons for placing characters where they are on the scale.
3. Using the list and reasoning from the previous task, what effect does a character's strength have on the family unit and what happens to them?
4. Eliat refers to family as 'the f-word' Page 184. Why does she see family in such a negative light?

### Choices

1. The characters in the novel do not always make the best decisions. In order to consider the impact of those decisions, complete the following chart. Make a list

of poor choices made by characters in the novel in the left hand column and complete the other columns.

| Decision  | What prompted decision | Impact on self | Impact of others |
|---|------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>e.g. Tash's decision to drink while minding Tash</i> |                        |                |                  |
|   |                        |                |                  |

2. Sarah says that it was the ‘Wrong place and wrong time, exactly’ when she had her accident. Is this true for all the characters? Is it a matter of bad luck and poor timing or are they responsible for their own outcomes?

### Memory

1. What memories do Eliat, Will and Sarah have? What do they have in common?
2. How does Hendrick reflect memory in Will’s chapters and what effect does this have?
3. Memories are important in order to create change. In what way do the characters’ memories lead to positive outcomes?

### RESPONDING

1. The decisions we make effect more than ourselves.  
Explore the ripple effect of the events in *The Accident*.
2. ‘No man is an island’  
In what way do the characters in *The Accident* attempt to create an ‘island’ for themselves?
3. ‘We can’t control the things that happen to us; we can only control how we respond to them.’ Are the characters in the novel in control of their own lives?
4. ‘A sense of not being quite so hopeless.’  
To what extent is this something the characters are looking for in *The Accident*?
5. The characters are all in a process of change in *The Accident*.  
Explore what change means for four of the characters.
6. Hendrick’s uses the perspective of her three protagonists to relate the story.  
Consider the peripheral characters in the novel and how their stories are revealed

bit by bit. Choose one of those characters and recount an event from the novel from their point of view.

7. Choose a media event from your local newspaper. Write about the event from three different perspectives in the style that Hendrick has. You might choose to simply write from three different points of view or you may also include from different periods of time, such as Before, After etc. Consider the way that people respond to an event differently depending on their circumstances.
8. Sarah uses a range of visual media to tell the story of her accident and her memories. Tell your own story using both written and visual texts. You should aim to use three different forms of communication, such as poetry, photographs, music, film or painting. Use your imagination.
9. Imagine you are a panellist on an awards committee for young adult fiction. In small groups, determine what you believe makes a good novel for young adults. List 5 key features you believe a winner of your award should have. *The Accident* is under consideration for this award. As a group, consider whether it meets your criteria and argue for or against its value as an award recipient.