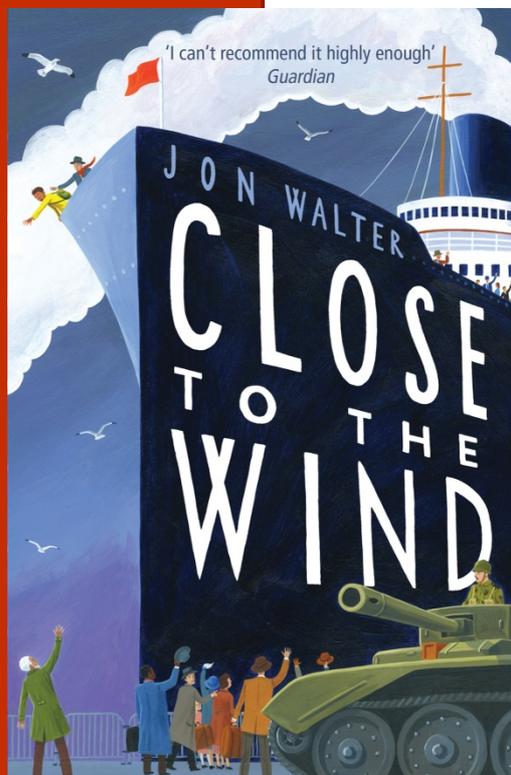


CLOSE TO THE WIND

JON WALTER



Malik and his grandfather, Papa, are in a war-torn country, and their only hope is a place on the last of the ships transporting people away from the burning and unsafe town. The cruel politics of survival dictate that one needs money and the right connections in order to secure a ticket to safety.

In a world where everyone is clamouring for safe passage, it's hard to know who to trust, and Papa makes some incredible sacrifices in order to ensure the safety of his grandson. And while aboard the ship Malik has his cat and makes friends with a ragtag crew of boys, there are still many challenges and unanswerable questions for him to face.

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TEACHER NOTES

- 'Nobody likes the dark. But you should remember that there's no one here and the dark can't hurt us' (p 15). What is the significance of Papa's words given their current situation? Why is it that the dark can't hurt them?
- Papa lies to Malik about the ship tickets and his mother, and to others about Malik being an orphan? Do you think this was the right thing for Papa to do? Why do you think other characters (Mariam, the purser) play along with Papa's lies? Do you think lies are sometimes okay? Is right and wrong always simple?
- Before the diamond theft occurred, what did you think of Angelo Vex? Did you think he was trustworthy and/or just as desperate as everyone else? What clues are there in the text that he may be a suspicious character (eg the onion idea, the expensive shoes, Vex nudging Hector, his name)?
- Discuss the significance of the title **Close to the Wind**. Papa uses the idiom 'It's sailing close to the wind' (p 127). Can

 SCHOLASTIC

Teacher notes written
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students guess what it might mean by the context? Explain the idiom. Do students think the title is appropriate? Why or why not?

- 'Malik was aware of his heart as a heavy weight inside his chest. But there was room for hope. If he had some hope, then maybe he could bear it. Only he would have to be patient.' Why is hope important in times of hardship? Consider Malik's current predicament – alone, without Papa and not knowing his mum's whereabouts – do you think it would be easy for him to be patient and hopeful? How have Papa's actions prepared Malik to deal with this predicament?
- The author, Jon Walter, never provides a definite place or time – other than hints that it is a modern world (plastic, cans, cereal bars) – for the setting of the story. Do you think this is intentional? Why do you think this might be?
- In the three parts of the novel, we are provided with different worlds – a war-torn town, a ship and a modern city. Find examples of descriptions of each of the places and discuss what atmosphere is created and how each location differs.
- Revisit the scene where Malik spots Angelo Vex and his family on the ship (pp 194–198). What are all the emotions and feelings that Malik experiences (eg hate, fear, anger, inferiority, helplessness)? Do you think his experience is understandable? Do you think it is okay that he feels hate towards all of the Vex family? Do you believe Malik is only thinking about the diamond theft in this moment?
- How is Sonny different from Malik? Do you believe their characters and the way they think are influenced by their upbringings? Was swapping Booty for the diamond an easy decision for Malik? Why or why not? How do you think he would have felt if he didn't take the diamond from Sonny?
- Discuss the various meanings of 'booty'. With this knowledge why might the author have chosen this name for the cat?
- Consider the novel's themes of money, happiness and friendship. Find examples in the text which explore these themes and discuss how they can seem both complex and simple in times of hardship.
- '[B]eing safe seemed to mean that everything would be painful all over again' (p 281). Discuss how Malik reacts to his new home. Even though Lucy is being kind, why does Malik feel this way?

- Being mindful of students' own backgrounds, take the opportunity to discuss the plight of refugees and the reality of being a stranger in a strange land. A useful site for this activity is <http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/resources/teaching-ideas.html>.
- Pretend you are Steffan, Oskar, Alex or Sonny and write a scene in the novel from their point of view.