



The Stalker

Gail Anderson-Dargatz

Reading Level: 4-5

Interest Level: Adult/Young Adult

Book Summary

Very early one Saturday morning, Mike's phone rings. "Nice day for a little kayak trip, eh?" says the deep, echoing voice. "But I wouldn't go out if I were you."

Mike's business is guiding visitors on kayak tours around the islands off the west coast. This weekend, he'll be taking Liz, his new cook, and two strangers on a kayak tour. Soon, his phone rings again. "I'm watching you," the caller says. "Stay home."

Mike and the others set off on their trip, but the stalker secretly follows them. Who is he? What will he do? *The Stalker* will keep you guessing until the end.

Author Biography

Gail Anderson-Dargatz is the author of the bestselling novels *A Recipe for Bees* and *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, both finalists for the Giller Prize. She currently teaches fiction in the creative writing program at the University of British Columbia. Gail lives with her husband and children in the Shuswap region of British Columbia, the landscape found in so much of her writing.

Note to the educator: The following activities are suggestions only. Please choose and adjust the projects and questions according to the specific needs and level of your students as well as their experience with doing novel studies. Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

Book Cover and Title

- (a) Write the word “stalker” on the board. Ask students to brainstorm words, feelings, and thoughts that come to mind. Have students think about stalker movies they have seen (e.g., *Cape Fear*, *Fatal Attraction*) and share how and why such movies keep the audience’s interest (e.g., use of the element of surprise; working on emotions/fear; use of suspense).
- (b) Have students look at the cover. Ask them to predict the setting of the story.
- (c) Have students identify the type of boat on the front cover. Then, ask them to share what they know about kayaking *and* canoeing. Have them search “kayaking” and “canoeing” in Google Images. After reviewing the images of each, have students describe the main differences between the two boats.

Burial Sites

Explain to students that in some First Nations cultures, a person’s personal possessions are buried with their body in the burial site. Burial sites are found in coastal areas, in mountain valleys, and in caves. The possessions may include medicines, bowls, spoons, and pipes, along with some corn and tobacco. These possessions, which represent the person’s life and culture, are buried with the body to enable the soul to be welcomed to its afterlife. Ask students to list five possessions they would have buried with them. Encourage students to list possessions that represent their lives. Have students express, in discussion or writing, why they chose the possessions they did.

Artifacts

Ask students if they have ever been to a museum. If so, ask them to describe some of the interesting objects they saw there. Explain that man-made objects from the past, such as tools or weapons, are called artifacts. Explain that artifacts can help experts or archeologists figure out how people from the past used to live.

Have students imagine they come across a cave full of interesting artifacts. They realize the cave is a burial site. Have the students discuss the following question: Do you take one of the artifacts as a souvenir? Why, or why not?

WORKING WITH THE BOOK

Characters

Tell students that readers can learn about the characters in a novel in three ways—from (1) what the writer tells us, (2) what the characters say, do, and think, and (3) what others think and say about the characters.

As students read, have them note a few examples from each chapter, where applicable, of how the writer develops the following characters: Gerald, Samantha, Dave, and Jason. Encourage students to make inferences about the characters, where possible. Then put the students in small groups and have them share their examples.

How do we make inferences?

Active readers use their experience and knowledge to make educated guesses about characters and their motivations. Readers who make inferences use clues in the text together with their own experiences to help them figure out the author's meaning.

Character: _____

What the writer tells us

Inference

What other characters think and say about the character

Inference

What the character says, does, and thinks

Inference

Plot

Explain to students that the authors of mysteries and thrillers include many possible suspects in their novels. Have students keep track of the suspects in *The Stalker* by noting (a) why they became suspects and (b) why they were eventually crossed off the list of suspects. After reading the book, have students look at the ways the writer makes readers believe that a character might be the stalker (e.g., relationships, personality, coincidence).

Chapter	Suspect	Why a suspect?	Why crossed off list of suspects?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			

Setting

Explain to students that setting is the time and location in which a story takes place, and that writers can create a mood, or feeling in the reader, with the way they describe the setting—by including descriptive detail and by using certain words or phrases. Then draw students' attention to the first paragraph of Chapter 2. Have them visualize the setting. Have them imagine they are sitting at one of the cafés. Ask them to describe how they feel.

Draw students' attention to Chapter 6, pages 45 to 46 (up to “ ‘Gerald,’ I called. ‘You can't go there!’ ”) Have them imagine that they are with the kayaking group. Ask them to describe how they feel in this setting. Then have them reread the two pages and list the details, words, and phrases that create this mood.

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. (a) Summarize Sara’s plan. What upset this plan?
(b) What goals does Sara hope to achieve through her actions?
(c) Would Sara have achieved her goals if Dave hadn’t called Mike? Give reasons for your answer.

2. “Men always underestimate what women can do...” (page 19)
(a) Do you agree that men underestimate what women can do? Explain your opinion.
(b) In what ways do women underestimate what men can do? Are they right in thinking this way?
(c) Think about the female characters in the story—Liz, Sara, and Sam. How do they surprise Mike?
(d) Think about the important women in your life. How are the female characters in the novel similar to the women in your life? Different?

3. (a) Why does Mike want to keep Gerald off Bone Island?
(b) “I love this stuff...” (page 21): What “stuff” is Gerald talking about? What does using the word “stuff” tell the reader about Gerald and his interest in First Nations culture?
(c) Find other examples of Gerald’s lack of sensitivity to First Nations culture.

4. “Gerald’s heavy English accent did come and go. I noticed only a hint of it when he talked to her.” (page 18)
(a) When does Gerald use his accent?
(b) Why doesn’t he use his accent when he talks with Samantha?
(c) Does the way you talk change, depending on who you are talking to? If so, can you explain why?

5. “I just want to locate them with my GPS.” (page 33)
- (a) What does Gerald want to locate? Why?
- (b) It is often said that technology is not bad, only the people who use it in bad ways. Provide examples of both positive and negative ways that the following technologies can be used:
- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| cell phones | smart phones |
| the internet | video recorders |
| email | GPS |
- (c) Do you think it is possible to prevent people from using technology in negative ways? If yes, how? If no, give reasons for your answer.
6. You can feel the spirits of the dead all around us... We don't belong here. What are we doing bringing these tourists to these graveyards?” (page 58)
- (a) Why does Mike bring tourists to the graveyards? Do you agree with Liz when she says they don't belong in the graveyards? Why, or why not?
- (b) Think about graveyards and cemeteries in your area. How are they a part of the community? What are people's attitudes toward cemeteries? How would you feel if strangers took pictures of your loved ones' graves? Explain why.
- (c) Some cultures see cemeteries as a place to celebrate life. For example, Mexico celebrates the Day of the Dead. Mexicans believe the soul never dies. Families go to cemeteries and picnic beside the graves of their loved ones. They decorate graves with flowers, candles, and skulls made of candy. It is a day of laughter, song, storytelling, and prayer. Would you feel comfortable celebrating life in this way? Explain why or why not.
7. Conflict in the story is important to the plot. Explain how the conflicts between the following people were important to this novel:
- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| Sam and Gerald | Sara and Dave |
| Liz and her ex | Sara and Liz |

8. “I wish he cared enough to do something like this.” (page 64)
- (a) What is “this” in the above quote?
 - (b) What does this quote tell readers about Sara’s idea of love?
 - (c) Who does Sara really love? Mike? Dave? Neither?
 - (d) Sara confuses love with other feelings like jealousy. (i) Think about the last time you felt jealous. Would you consider jealousy a positive or negative emotion? Explain your answer. (ii) Does jealousy ever indicate love? If yes, how and when? If no, why not? Why do people confuse jealousy with love?
9. Some sentences take on a deeper, more important meaning after you know the whole story. Explain how the meaning of the each sentence below changes after knowing the whole story.
- (a) “I knew right then that Gerald would cause me a whole lot of trouble.” (page 21)
 - (b) “You’re not planning to come with us, are you?” (page 22)
 - (c) “They were always for you.” (page 24)
 - (d) “We have to be prepared for anything.” (page 25)
 - (e) “You will be perfectly safe. I’ll make sure of it.” (page 26)
10. “ ‘I do make it a policy not to get involved with my employees,’ I said. ‘Seems like a good rule, after this past weekend.’ ” (page 73)
- (a) Why did Mike think it was a good rule, after the events of the weekend?
 - (b) Did Mike break his rule? Why?
 - (c) Do you think it is a good rule? Why?

WRITING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Choose a character or an event from the novel that you connected with in some way. For example, did the character or event remind you of something in your life? Cause an emotional reaction in you? Teach you something? Describe what, how, and why.
2. Imagine you are a novice kayaker. You go on a day trip with Mike and Liz. Write an email to a friend describing your trip. Include your thoughts and feelings. Include details such as the look of the marina, what you saw on the trip, where you stopped for lunch, the highlights of your trip, etc.
3. Choose an important person in your life. Write a journal entry that describes your last act of love toward this person. Describe what you said or did. How did it make you feel? How did it make the other person feel?

PROJECTS and ACTIVITIES

1. Create a movie

Tell students that they are going to make a movie, based on *The Stalker*.

(a) Be a casting agent

Ask students to name their favourite actors and movies. Ask them to explain why they like certain actors in certain roles. Explain to students that a casting agent decides which actors should play the roles in movies. Tell the students they are going to be Hollywood casting agents. Then put the students in groups and have them discuss the following questions:

(i) Think about the characters in the book. What do you know about how they look and act? What are their main characteristics? What are their approximate ages?

(ii) In adapting the novel for the screen, are there any changes you would like to make to any of the characters? Would you like them to be older or younger? Stronger in any way? More, or less, glamorous?

(iii) Are there any characters you would like to get rid of? Would you like to add characters?

(iv) Think of Hollywood actors that could play the various parts.

(b) Be a screenwriter

Explain to students that screenwriters write the screenplays for movies. Tell the students they are going to be screenwriters for the movie *The Stalker*. Explain that the producer of the movie wants the setting to be the 1990s, before cell phones. Tell students to review the story and discuss any necessary changes to the plot.

(c) Be a location scout

Explain to students that location scouts seek out the perfect settings for movies. Tell the students that they are going to be location scouts for the movie *The Stalker*. Show students how to use Google Images. Have them “scout” the perfect places to film the following settings in the book: (a) the marina, (b) the BC coastline, and (c) Bone Island. Then have students explain how the images they have chosen suit the settings and action described in the book.

2. Create a time capsule

Introduce students to the notion of time capsules. Explain that the objects in a time capsule are similar to artifacts because they represent the current culture (e.g., a time capsule from the 1960s might include a Beatles album and a tie-dyed T-shirt) and that the purpose is to bury the capsule for later discovery. Put students into groups and have them draw up a list of 20 items that they would include in a time capsule to represent the first decade of the new millennium. Have students share their lists and agree upon a final list of 20 items. Then have students discuss the possibility of actually creating a time capsule and consider these questions: (a) What could be used as a container for the time capsule? (b) How could the items on the list be obtained for the time capsule? (c) Where could the time capsule be buried? (Alternatively, each group can make a collage of the 20 items on its list. The collages can be displayed. Students can explain how they decided what to include.)

3. Design a poster

Have each student design a poster for Mike's sea-kayaking company. Tell students to choose a business name, a logo, and a snappy slogan, and to include any necessary information on the poster (e.g., contact information). Have students think about images they could use on the poster. Use images from the internet to create a prototype of the poster. Display the posters.

FURTHER READING

If students liked this book, they might also enjoy:

The Hangman, Louise Penny, Good Reads (GRP)

Chickenfeed, Minette Walters, Quick Reads (GRP)

Drive into Danger, Rosemary Border, Oxford Bookworms (GRP)

Dead Man's Island, John Escott, Oxford Bookworms (GRP)

Skyjack!, Tim Vicary, Oxford Bookworms (GRP)

Good Reads books are produced in partnership by
Grass Roots Press and ABC Life Literacy Canada, with support
from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

