



Teachers' Notes by Emma Egan, a practising teacher working with the Australian Curriculum and International Baccalaureate (IB)

Danger Road is a contemporary Australian mystery novel that follows two brothers, Alex and Leo, as they begin investigating a hit-and-run that happened years earlier. The case is a cold one, but it still affects their family and the wider community, and as the boys start asking questions, they quickly realise that the past is not as settled as it seems.

Although Alex and Leo are only 15 months apart in age and have grown up in the same household and school, they are very different. The novel is written in alternating chapters, with each chapter told from one brother's point of view. This makes it easy for students to see how differently the boys think, notice details, and respond to the same situations, and it gives clear opportunities to discuss voice, perspective, and character.

As the story unfolds, the boys explore the case through a true-crime style podcast, which raises important questions about curiosity, responsibility, and the impact of retelling real events. The novel encourages readers to think about whether finding the truth always leads to justice, and what can happen when stories are treated like puzzles rather than real experiences that affect real people.

The fast pace, short chapters, and frequent cliffhanger endings make *Danger Road* engaging for middle years readers, while the themes of family, friendship, empathy, and moral choice provide depth for discussion and analysis. The novel also works well across learning areas, particularly English and Visual Arts, through its use of sketches, symbolism, and strong sensory description.

Overall, *Danger Road* offers students the chance to:

- think about how stories are told from different points of view
- compare characters who share the same background but respond differently
- discuss ethical questions around truth, justice, and responsibility
- respond creatively through writing, discussion, and visual art

Allison Tait (A.L. Tait) is the internationally published, bestselling author of 11 middle-grade novels, including 'almost history' adventure series *The Mapmaker Chronicles*, *The Ateban Cipher* and the *Maven & Reeve Mysteries*, as well as contemporary mysteries, *The First Summer of Callie McGee*, *Willow Bright's Secret Plot* and *Danger Road*.

Allison's books have been short- and long-listed for many awards, including CBCA Notables (*Race To The End of The World* (*The Mapmaker Chronicles* #1)), *The Fire Star* (*Maven & Reeve* #1), Aurealis Awards, 2015 Readings Children's Prize, and 2024 Margaret and Colin Roderick Literary Award (*The First Summer of Callie McGee*).

A multi-genre writer, journalist, creative writing teacher and speaker, Allison is co-founder of the Your Kid's Next Read community and co-host of the top-rating Your Kid's Next Read podcast and former co-host of the So You Want To Be A Writer podcast. She lives on the south coast of NSW (Australia) with her family.



Curriculum	Elaboration
Australian Curriculum V9	<p>Language & Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC9E6LE01 / AC9E7LE01 / AC9E8LE01 / AC9E9LE01 • AC9E6LE03 / AC9E7LE03 / AC9E8LE03 / AC9E9LE03 <p>Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC9E6LY02 / AC9E7LY02 / AC9E8LY02 / AC9E9LY02 • AC9E6LY05 / AC9E7LY05 / AC9E8LY05 / AC9E9LY05 <p>Visual Arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC9AVA6E01 / AC9AVA8E01 / AC9AVA10E01 • AC9AVA6D01 / AC9AVA8D01 / AC9AVA10D01 • AC9AVA6R01 / AC9AVA8R01 / AC9AVA10R01
PYP/MYP Alignment	<p>PYP</p> <p>Key Concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form – How crime and mystery narratives are structured • Causation – Why events occur and how actions lead to consequences • Perspective – How different characters and audiences interpret events • Responsibility – Ethical choices and accountability • Reflection – Considering emotional and intellectual responses to texts <p>Approaches to Learning (ATL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking skills – Analysing evidence, making inferences, evaluating alternatives • Communication skills – Participating in discussions, justifying viewpoints • Self-management skills – Reflecting on emotional responses and decision-making <p>Learner Profile Attributes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquirers – Investigating mysteries and questioning evidence • Thinkers – Analysing problems and ethical dilemmas • Communicators – Expressing ideas clearly and respectfully • Reflective – Considering personal responses and learning • Caring / Principled – Understanding the impact of actions on others <p>MYP</p> <p>Key Concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective – Understanding diverse viewpoints • Relationships – Examining interpersonal and societal connections <p>Related Concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characterisation • Theme • Point of view • Structure <p>Global Contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identities and Relationships – Family, friendship, and self-identity • Fairness and Development – Justice, ethics, and responsibility in society



Questions to ask before reading the novel

- Examine the cover of the novel – what does it suggest about the story and themes inside?
- What prior experiences do you have with crime or mystery texts (e.g. novels, films, podcasts, documentaries)?
- Have you encountered true crime stories through podcasts, documentaries, or news reports? What features stood out to you?
- In what ways can a true crime story be compared to a puzzle that requires readers to ask questions and seek evidence?
- How do you think a fast-paced narrative – where events occur over a short time frame (such as a few days) – might affect tension, suspense, and reader engagement?
- What do you already know about hit-and-run incidents? What questions might investigators or witnesses need to answer in these cases?
- What does the term ‘cold case’ mean, and why might these cases be difficult ways to solve?

Grab and go while reading each chapter

Chapter 1

Introduces the central characters and conflict and establishes family dynamics that drive the investigation.

- The boys are clearly unhappy about having to work together. Why do you think their mother insists on this arrangement?
- What do you think is more important to their mother at this point: finding answers about the incident, or encouraging the boys to work together and rebuild their relationship? Explain your reasoning.
- The novel references listening to podcasts in the car. Why might the author include this detail? How does it connect to the genre of the story?
- Based on this first chapter, what do we already know about the boys as characters (e.g. personality, attitudes, relationship with each other)? What evidence from the text supports your ideas?

Chapter 2

Introduces key secondary characters and deepening the emotional and thematic connections between past and present.

- This chapter introduces additional characters, including Harry, Coach and Jack. What do we learn about each of them through their actions, dialogue, and interactions with others?
- How do Coach and Jack contribute to our understanding of the boys’ world and the broader community?
- At the end of the chapter, Leo compares his own life with Corey’s, noting that they are similar ages but living in different eras. What do you think Leo is reflecting on in this moment?
- Why might the author draw a parallel between Leo and Corey? How does this comparison help build tension or deepen the mystery?

Chapter 3

Exploring the evolving relationships between characters, particularly the boys, and considering how family expectations shape behaviour.

- In this chapter, the dynamics between Leo and Jack are explored. How are their interactions developing, and what does this reveal about their personalities, motivations, or relationship?
- By the end of the chapter, Alex wants to stand up for Leo. In light of their mother’s goal for the boys to work together, do you think her strategy is having the intended effect? Why or why not?
- How might Alex’s choice to intervene reflect on themes of loyalty, responsibility, and moral decision-making in this story?



Grab and go while reading each chapter continued...

Chapter 4 Developing character understanding, exploring different perspectives, and introducing mystery clues that drive the investigation forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• By this chapter, we have seen more of both boys' personalities. Considering the alternating chapter structure, what differences and contrasts have you noticed between Leo and Alex so far? How do their perspectives influence the way the story is told?• Think about the character Corey. Even though he is no longer present to tell his story, his life has become the 'story' (p.45). Why do you think the author chooses to present Corey in this way? What effect does it have on the reader?• Character analysis: On page 48, Leo is observing and analysing Alex. What does this reveal about Alex's personality? Would you describe him as an introvert or extrovert? Why? Which character do you relate to more: Leo or Alex?• Discuss the significance of the word 'sorry' found on the tree. Have the boys discovered a new clue? Could this clue have been interpreted or investigated in another way? Where do you think the story should go next?• The text mentions an 'aura of sorrow'. How does this description contribute to mood, atmosphere, or the reader's emotional response at this point on the story?
Chapter 5 The investigation intensifies and the narrative encourages students to think creatively about storytelling and presentation of events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On page 57, the narrative feels like it 'becomes real' for the characters. Why do you think the events feel more real now compared to earlier in the story? What has changed in terms of character perspective, tension, or stakes?• Imagine you were creating your own podcast episode based on this story. What key information would you include? Who would you interview and why? How would you ensure your audience understands the events and their significance?• How does thinking about presenting a story as a podcast help you analyse what is important in a narrative and how stories are structured for an audience?
Chapter 6 Exploring character courage, moral choices, and motivations behind actions, while reinforcing thematic elements of responsibility and empathy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On page 73, Leo observes: 'Inwardly I applaud him as a brave soldier going into battle...' What does this metaphor reveal about how Leo perceives Alex? How does it contribute to characterisation and tension?• On page 77, Coach says: 'Don't think, just do.' What does this reveal about his personality and approach to challenges? How much impact do you think this has on Leo?• Consider Coach's background: he joined the police force because he wanted to make a difference. In what ways does his experience and role influence the boys? How does it help advance the story's investigation?• How do the actions and reflections of Alex, Leo, Coach and Corey contribute to the story's themes of courage, ethics, and responsibility?
Chapter 7 Examining teamwork, support and the role of constructive criticism in developing character and trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On page 91, the concept of constructive criticism is introduced. What does constructive criticism mean? How do you feel about receiving it, and in what ways can it be helpful?• At the end of the chapter, Alex mentions a 'sense of standing behind me'. What does this suggest about support, trust, or family? How does this affect your understanding of the boys' relationships?



Grab and go while reading each chapter continued...

Chapter 8 Exploring the influence of secondary characters and how guidance, encouragement and personality quirks shape the boys' development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jack's grandmother, Marlene, is introduced with a tinkling laugh. What does this small detail reveal about her personality?• Marlene encourages the boys to get their licences, even though she doesn't drive herself. Why might she make this suggestion? Why do you think she doesn't drive? How does this influence your perception of her character?
Chapter 9 Highlighting differing perspectives, ethical reasoning, and the tension between curiosity and parental authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On page 112, Mum talks about thinking like a podcast or a puzzle to solve, rather than focusing on the real people affected by the events. How does this reveal her priorities or perspective?• Mum tells the boys to stop investigating. Why don't they stop? Why might she want them to stop? How do these decisions highlight family dynamics and conflict in the story?
Chapter 10 Examining motivation, problem-solving, personality traits, and the fragility of friendships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why did Mr Steadman come back? If he didn't enjoy certain experiences growing up, why would he leave and return? What does this suggest about personal motivation and choices?• How frustrating is it when you miss something obvious that feels right in front of you? Can you give examples from the text or your own experiences?• Alex is described as someone who 'isn't a joiner' in sport or social situations. What does this reveal about his personality? How might this influence his decisions?• At page 137, Jack and Leo's friendship is described as brittle. Think about your own friendships: are they strong, like copper and tin, or a little brittle? Why? How can we understand these dynamics help in analysing characters?
Chapter 11 Exploring family dynamics, focusing on the father's behaviour and its impact on the boys.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your thoughts about Dad so far, apart from his drinking habits? How does his phone conversation influence the story and the boys' perspectives?
Chapter 12 Investigating cause and effect, as the boys push forward with their investigation and face possible consequences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why did Alex and Harry question the podcast host? What potential implications or repercussions might this have?• On page 169, are there other conclusions that could be drawn from the evidence? Consider possibilities like MJ or the Mayor.



Grab and go while reading each chapter continued...

Chapter 13 Analysing questioning techniques, inference, and how subtle clues advance the investigation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">On page 180, why are the questions Mrs Woodyard asks important or interesting? What is notable about how they are phrased – and Alex’s questions in return?On page 183, how does Alex know that Mrs Woodyard wrote ‘sorry’ and what it stands for, even though she didn’t say it directly?
Chapter 14 Examining perspective, problem-solving strategies, and the integration of Mrs Woodyard into the investigation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">On page 190, the text mention that things look bigger from an ant’s perspective. Why might the author bring this to the reader’s attention while the boys are at The Drop?Pause at page 195, what are your thoughts about the story at this point?Discuss Mrs Woodyard’s character – how is she fitting into the investigation and the boys’ dynamic?Use this chapter to dissect problem-solving strategies (not just in maths) – e.g. questioning, putting ideas aside, looking from different perspectives. How do the characters model this?
Chapter 15 Exploring paradoxes and the nature of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">How can things change but not change? What does the author mean by this in the context of the story?
Chapter 16 Reflecting on calm, responsibility and discerning intentions of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Leo has the house to himself and feels a sense of calmness. When do you experience this still, calm feeling?The Mayor asks for commissioned artwork – do you think this is legitimate or a distraction? Why?Why did Leo feel the need to apologise to Harry again the following day?Pause at page 233 – discuss with students where the story is at and what they think will happen next.
Chapter 17 Examining physiological responses, decision-making under stress and interpretation of subtle clues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">On page 234, the ‘fight or flight’ reflex is mentioned. What is this, have you experienced it and which response is typical for you?What do you think about the boys going off in the middle of the night?On page 237, which car do you think Leo is referring to, given there are multiple cars in the shed?Pause at page 241 – reflect: how do you feel, and what are you thinking at this point in the story?On page 245, Leo realises that the grandma ‘doesn’t drive’ not ‘can’t drive’. What is the significance of this wording? What do you think made her stop driving?At the end of the chapter, why do you think the boys left instead of confronting her family with the information?
Chapter 18 Considering consequences, ethical outcomes and the wider impact of solving the mystery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Finding the answer has helped Corey’s mum, but how has it affected other people? Has it helped, hurt or done something else? Why?



Questions to ask after reading

- How did the conclusion of 'Danger Road' leave you feeling as a reader? What aspects of the ending contributed to this response?
- Why is resolution important in crime and mystery narratives? How might the story's impact change if there were no clear resolution?
- How do you respond as an audience member when a true crime story (podcast, documentary or article) has no resolution? Why do you think this is?
- The ending of the novel raises many questions. Discuss the author's possible intentions in choosing this ending, including:
 - Why might the author have chosen this particular ending for the story?
 - Why do you think the final events occur in the middle of the night? How does the setting affect tension and mood?
 - Why do you think Leo did not explain his plan to Alex or seek help from a trusted adult, such as his coach? How does this decision align with earlier events, including their mother's wishes?
 - In what ways could the outcome have been different? What alternative choices might the characters have made, and how would these have changed the story?
- Consider Jack's situation at the end of the novel. How might the events have affected him emotionally and socially (e.g. learning the truth about his grandmother, being sent away, and the impact on his rugby future)?
- Has reading 'Danger Road' influenced your interest in crime or true crime texts? Would you choose to read or listen to similar stories in the future? Why or why not?

Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Truth, Justice and Responsibility• Perspective and Interpretation• Family, Relationships and Belonging• Grief, Guilt and the Weight of the Past• Courage and Moral Choice• Adolescence, Identity and Growing Independence• The Impact of Secrets and silence• Problem-Solving and Inquiry
Key Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Truth has consequences• Perspective shapes understanding• Young people are capable of complex thinking and ethical decision-making• Silence and secrecy can delay healing• Courage is not only physical• Relationships influence choices• The past continues to shape the present• Problem-solving is a transferable life skill
Writing Style - Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chapter 10 in the novel ends with a number of questions and tension. Rewrite the final paragraphs or page, keeping the events the same but changing the wording to increase the suspense.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Use short sentences or sentence fragments◦ Withhold key information deliberately◦ Focus on mood, atmosphere and uncertainty◦ End with a line that makes the reader want to keep reading• Optional challenge – explain in 2-3 sentences why your ending is more effective than the original.



Key Study Activities

The Evidence Wall	<p>Create a class evidence board (physical or digital) Students add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clues• Quotes• Suspects <p>Revisit after each chapter to update theories Twist – students must remove one theory when new evidence appears</p>
Decision Dice	<p>At key moments, roll a dice with outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask for help• Keep investigating• Confront someone• Walk away• Wait• Act now <p>Groups discuss how each choice would change the story</p>
Four Corners Moral Dilemmas	<p>Place signs around the room: Strongly agree/ Agree/ Disagree/ Strongly disagree</p> <p>Read a statement, such as: 'The boys were right to keep investigating.'</p> <p>Students move, then defend their position.</p>
Tension Tracker	<p>Students graph tension across chapters using a simple line graph.</p> <p>Justify spikes and drops with quotes</p> <p>Excellent link to cliffhangers and pacing</p>



Character Analysis

Character Analysis: Same Upbringing, Different Voices	Despite being raised in the same family, attending the same school, and being only 15 months apart, Alex and Leo respond to the world in markedly different ways. Allison Tait uses alternating chapters to develop two distinct character voices, allowing readers to clearly identify which brother is narrating through language, focus, and internal thinking.
Focus Discussion: Character Voice	Teacher prompt: The novel is written in alternating chapters, each from either Alex's or Leo's perspective. Even without names, readers can often tell which brother is narrating. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What clues does the author give us about who is speaking?• How do thought patterns, sentence style, and focus differ between the boys?• What does each boy notice first in a situation – people, feelings, details, logic, action? Purpose: To help students recognise how authorial choices create distinct narrative voices.
Task 1: Venn Diagram – Alex and Leo Focus: Comparing character traits and shared experiences	Task: Students create a Venn diagram comparing Alex and Leo. Encourage students to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personality traits• Ways of thinking and problem-solving• Emotional responses• Relationships with others• Evidence from the text (quotes or examples) Teacher note: The overlap should highlight shared experiences (family, loss, curiosity), while differences should show how each brother processes events uniquely. Optional extension (Years 8–9): Students annotate each point with a short explanation of how the author shows this, rather than simply stating it.
Task 2: Finding the Voice Focus: Narrative voice and perspective	Task: Provide students with two short, unnamed excerpts from the novel (one from Alex's perspective and one from Leo's). Students identify which brother is narrating and justify their choice. Students must: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify at least two language or thinking clues• Explain how these clues signal character voice Alternative (low-prep): Students choose a paragraph from the text and explain how they know which brother is narrating. Purpose: To deepen understanding of how voice, tone, and perspective shape character. Optional Differentiation for all Character Tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Year 6–7: Focus on observable traits and clear examples• Year 8–9: Focus on inference, internal conflict, and authorial technique



Artistic element

Mini Art Task 1: Visualising the Crime Scene

Chapters 4–5

Focus: Perspective, visual interpretation, and inference

Task:

Students create a sketched interpretation of the crime scene as they currently understand it from the text.

Teachers should encourage students to:

- Choose a specific perspective (e.g. eye-level, distance, partially obscured, from above)
- Include only details supported by the text
- Consider what is shown and what is deliberately left out
- Use labelling or annotations to explain key choices

Discussion prompt:

How does changing the perspective alter what feels important or unsettling about the scene?

Purpose:

To explore how readers visualise events differently and how perspective shapes meaning.

Mini Art Task 2: Creating Movement Through Line

Chapter 7 (p. 87)

Focus: Line, texture, and implied movement

Task:

Students experiment with line and texture to show movement in a natural environment, inspired by Alex's sketches.

Students may:

- Use repeated lines, varied pressure, or directional marks
- Layer lines to suggest wind, motion, or tension
- Compare static vs dynamic line work

Teacher prompt:

Alex's drawings make the grass feel alive and moving. What visual techniques might he be using to achieve this effect?

Reflection (short written or oral):

Which technique best created a sense of movement? Why?

Purpose:

To connect visual techniques to descriptive language in the text and authorial intent.

Mini Art Task 3: Responding Through the Senses

Chapter 15 (p. 206) – “I can feel everything”

Focus: Sensory response and emotional interpretation

Task:

Students create an abstract or symbolic artwork that responds to the quote “I can feel everything”.

Students should:

- Use colour, shape, and texture to represent emotion or sensory overload
- Avoid literal illustration
- Choose materials that reflect feeling (e.g. rough, smooth, layered, blurred)

Optional extension:

Students write a brief artist's statement explaining how their visual choices represent feeling rather than events.

Purpose:

To explore how art can express internal experience and emotional intensity.



Vocab

Tier 1 – Contemporary Language (Everyday, informal, context-rich)

slyly (p.8)
lingo (p.11)
shrieking (p.37)
floordrobe (p.46)
crows (p.51)
perching (p.204)
spry (p.242)

Tier 2 – Vocabulary (High-utility, transferrable across subjects)

constitute (p.5)
speculate (p.27)
inclusivity (p.30)
shrill (p.37)
probes (p.60)
stellar (p.61)
novice (p.72)
constructive criticism (p.91)
disembodied (p.106)
perplexed (p.129)
cryptic (p.131)
candid (p.139)
derisive / derisively (p.146 / p.248)
philosophical (p.149)
glowering (p.151) residual (p.151)
claustrophobic (p.152)
monologue (p.164)
injustice (p.165)
placated (p.171)
obliterating (p.182)
dubious (p.215)
incandescent (p.257)
debacle (p.263)
tribute (p.263)

Tier 3 – Vocabulary (Subject or domain specific)

legalese (p.195)
telepathic (p.194)
nonchalantly (p.196)
suspicion (p.204)
innuendo (p.204)

Word Structure Task

- Identify any prefix (e.g. in-, non-, tele-)
- Identify any suffix (e.g. -ed, -ly, -tion, -ic)
- How does the prefix or suffix change the meaning?
(Example: injustice → in- = not / justice = fairness)

Grammar Focus Task

Choose one:

- Identify the part of speech
- Change the word into a different form (noun → verb → adjective)
- Rewrite the sentence using the word in a different tense

Meaning in Context

- How is the word used in the novel?
- What clues helped you understand it without a dictionary?



Possible extension/small group ideas

Extension Activities

Alternative Ending

Students write an alternative ending that changes one key decision. They must justify how this affects characters, themes, and consequences.

Podcast Episode Creation

Create a short true-crime style podcast episode about the case, including an introduction, evidence overview, interviews, and ethical considerations.

Perspective Rewrite

Rewrite a pivotal scene from another character's point of view (e.g. Mum, Coach, Marlene, MJ), focusing on how perspective alters meaning.

Character Case File

Compile a case file for a key character (profile, motivations, secrets, relationships, ethical dilemmas).

Theme Tracker

Track one theme across multiple chapters using quotes and short reflections on how it develops.

Ethical Debate

Write and present an argument: Should the boys have continued investigating after being told to stop?

Small Group Discussion Ideas

Hot Seat a Character

One student role-plays a character while others ask questions about motivations and decisions.

Agree / Disagree Statements

Groups respond to statements such as "Finding the truth always leads to justice" using evidence from the text.

Clue Ranking

Groups rank clues from least to most important and justify their reasoning.

Problem-Solving Walkthrough

Groups map the steps the boys take to solve the mystery and identify where alternative choices could have been made.

Perspective Circles

Each group represents a different character's perspective on the same event, then compares viewpoints.

Want more?

Hear Allison Tait read the first chapter of *Danger Road* here:

<https://www.yourkidsnextread.com.au/podcast-episode/friday-first-chapters-12-a-l-tait-reads-danger-road/>

Listen to Allison talk about the inspiration, writing process and creating the narrative voices for *Danger Road* here (from 10.13 mark):

<https://www.writerscentre.com.au/blog/ep-677/>

Allison talks about breaking down her novel to create author presentations and workshops for *Danger Road* (from around 14.39 mark): <https://www.yourkidsnextread.com.au/podcast-episode/episode-210-preparing-for-author-visits/>

Would you like Allison to visit your school? Contact her here:

<https://allisontait.com/speaking/>

