



Breath

By Tim Winton

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Genre & subjects

Death Fiction

Australian Fiction

Synopsis

On the wild, lonely coast of Western Australia, two thrill-seeking and barely adolescent boys fall into the enigmatic thrall of veteran big-wave surfer Sando. Together they form an odd but elite trio. The grown man initiates the boys into a kind of Spartan ethos, a regimen of risk and challenge, where they test themselves in storm swells on remote and shark-infested reefs, pushing each other to the edges of endurance, courage, and sanity.

Author biography

Tim Winton has published over twenty books for adults and children, and his work has been translated into twenty-five languages. Since his first novel, *An Open Swimmer*, won the Australian/Vogel Award in 1981, he has won the Miles Franklin Award four times (for *Shallows*, *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and *Breath*) and twice been short-listed for the Booker Prize (for *The Riders* and *Dirt Music*). He lives in Western Australia.

Discussion starters

- The story of Pikelet's experiences with Sando and Loonie are framed by scenes from his life as an older man. How would you describe his attitude towards the young man he was back then, and toward the choices he made?
- Is Sando a good influence on the boys? Does he help them in any way? Do you think he has their best interests at heart?
- Pikelet and Loonie come together as friends over their shared fascination with risk. How do they ultimately experience surfing differently? What is it about them that leads their paths to diverge over the course of the story?
- What is Eva's attitude toward Sando's relationship with the boys? What feelings does it bring up about her own situation and her own history?
- What do you think draws Pikelet and Eva together? What does each of them get from their relationship? Do you think Pikelet bears some responsibility for what happens between them?
- Look at the scene where Sando, Loonie and Pikelet go to surf the Nautilus (p. 144-147). Why do you think Pikelet chooses not to surf that day? How does his refusal affect the course of his relationship with Sando and Loonie?
- Several times in the story characters mention a resistance to being an "ordinary person," and many of the risks they take are motivated by a desire to stand outside ordinary life. Is this a healthy impulse? Have you experienced it, or known people who have? How do people you know handle it?

- Later in the book we learn that Pikelet spent some time in an institution. What do you think happened in his mind to get him there? How did the surfing and the relationship with Eva affect him later in life?
- Near the end of the story Pikelet sees footage of an aerial skier falling, howling in agony, and it reminds him of himself, a “slow-motion replay of how my mind had worked for too long”(p. 214). What do you think he recognizes in the skier and himself?
- Do you think Pikelet and Loonie learn something of value from the risks they take? Are they better off for having endured the fear and surfed with Sando? Is it necessary to take these kinds of risks in order to feel alive?
- Why do you think it’s so important for the narrator to show his daughters that he surfs, that he “also does something completely pointless and beautiful”? What kind of relationship do you think he has with them?
- How do the two boys’ relationships with their parents contribute to their behavior as teenagers? Is surfing and their bond with Sando somehow a reaction against the place they came from?

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