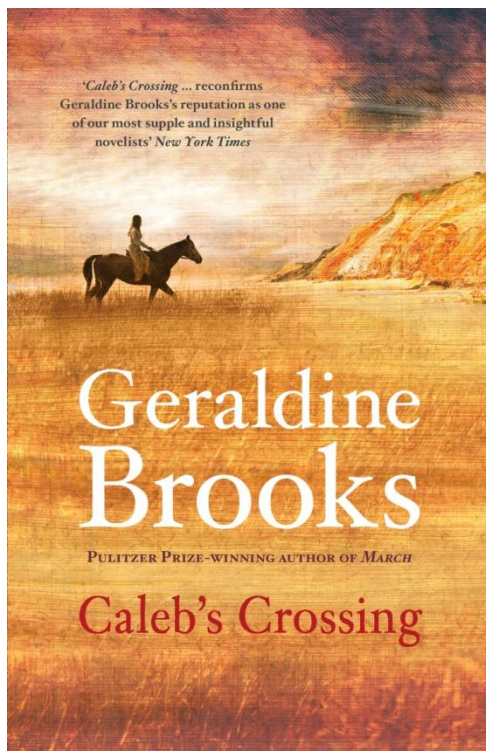


## Caleb's Crossing

### Teacher's Notes



**By: Geraldine Brooks**

**ISBN: 9780732289232**

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**Notes by Mandy Newman**

Includes: Summary, discussion questions and enhanced classroom activities

### **About the Book**

The book is inspired by the life of Caleb Cheeshahteumauk, a member of the Wampanoag tribe on an island that is now known as Martha's Vineyard in the United States. In 1665, Caleb became the first American Indian to graduate from Harvard — the oldest higher educational institution in the United States. *Caleb's Crossing* is about Caleb's journey from the Island to Harvard but it is also Bethia Mayfield's story. Bethia is a young Puritan girl, who becomes Caleb's lifelong friend, who also longs for an education but is denied. The novel is about a unique time in American history, the intersection of two people from different cultures and ideas, and the love they share for each other and their home. From the few facts that survive of Caleb's extraordinary life, Geraldine Brooks creates a luminous yet harsh tale of love and faith, pain, and magic.

When Bethia Mayfield, a spirited twelve-year-old living in the rigid confines of an English Puritan

settlement — and the daughter of a Calvinist Pastor — meets Caleb, the young son of a Wampanoag chieftain, the two forge a secret friendship that draws each into the alien world of the other.

As Bethia's father feels called to convert the Wampanoag to his own strict faith, he awakens the wrath of the medicine men. Caleb becomes a prize in a contest between old ways and new, eventually taking his place at Harvard, studying Latin and Greek alongside the sons of the colonial elite.

Fighting for a voice in a society that requires her silence, Bethia becomes entangled in Caleb's struggle to navigate the intellectual and cultural shoals that divide their two cultures.

### **About the author**

Geraldine Brooks is one of Australia's finest authors. She is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *March, Year of Wonders, People of the Book* and *Caleb's Crossing* and the non-fiction works *Nine Parts of Desire* and *Foreign Correspondence*. Previously, Brooks was a correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* in Bosnia, Somalia, and the Middle East. Born and raised in Australia, she divides her time between Sydney and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. She lives with her husband, the author Tony Horwitz, and their two sons, Nathaniel and Bizuayehu.

You can visit her website at: <http://www.geraldinebrooks.com>

Watch a short video about the inspiration for *Caleb's Crossing*:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULilLp1mnmQ&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULilLp1mnmQ&feature=player_embedded)

Author interviews about *Caleb's Crossing*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=fvwp&NR=1&v=E8HDT208iM4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7ebaJnUtlY&feature=related>

### **To the Teacher**

These notes and activities are generally suited to students in years 10-12 but could be used more widely. Please select and adapt according to your students' needs. Some websites have been linked to these classroom activities, but your school library or public library will have wonderful resources, too. Help students develop their information literacy skills by discussing other possible sources/places to access information.

*Caleb's Crossing* is suitable for study in a range of disciplines such as English, American History and Colonialism, Studies of Religion, Politics and Feminism. It would also be useful for areas of study on themes such as Belonging, Change, Conflict, Power and The Hero's Journey.

### **Inspiration for the story – Place and consciousness**

Geraldine Brooks lives in Martha's Vineyard. Her love of Martha's Vineyard helped inspire the story and provides the anchor for it. The book is very much about geography and landscape and the relationship that landscape can have to identity. Does the Island become a metaphor for the love that Bethia feels for Caleb? How does Bethia's interior world mirror her surroundings? Do the English and the American Indians view the landscape differently?

In a recent interview with Jennifer Byrne on the Tuesday Book Club, which you can find at

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s3278088.htm>, Geraldine said:

'Martha's Vineyard a really unusual place. It's an island seven miles off the coast of Massachusetts. There's no bridge or anything. You have to get on a boat to get there, which gives it a wonderful remove. It's about 100 square miles, and I don't know what that is in real money anymore. (Laughs) But it's a very diverse 100 square miles, so there are beautiful, you know, beaches and woods and hills and ponds and all this kind of physical natural beauty, and there's kind of an ethos there that this is very much a place apart, and it always has been. So, there's not one traffic light on the island, there's not one neon sign. There's only, I think, two chain store enterprises have managed to breach the walls, but basically it's a place for individual little stores and things like that. And old-time islanders will say, when they're getting on the ferry, 'I'm going to America today.'

And then there's this other aspect to it, which is, in summer, it becomes this playground for all kinds of, you know, fabulously wealthy gazillionaires and famous people, and you know, you're going to buy a bunch of leeks at the farmer's market and you turn around and there's Jake Gyllenhaal behind you, and Tom Hanks has, you know, got his baseball cap on at the, you know, at the market. So, uh, it's weird. So, for about two months every year, it's one way, and then September comes and everybody goes back to school and to their real life, and it's as if somebody picked up the island and turned it over and shook it and all the people fell off, and you're back with your neighbours, which includes the Wampanoag tribe of Gay Head, Aquinnah, who are Native Americans who have never been displaced from their own

land, and that's, unfortunately, a remarkable thing in the United States.

Additional author interview on how her surroundings and love of the landscape helped inspire the story can be found here: <http://bookpage.com/interview/finding-a-piece-of-history-in-her-own-backyard>

**Class exercise:** Place can define us. Where we come from or finding a place that allows us to be who we really are can change our lives forever. Similarly a place, a house, a town, a school, a tree can be the site of such pain, that we may never want to go there ever again. This is a good exercise to illustrate how in fiction and film, a characters interior world is often mirrored in their exterior world.

Ask students to think about their favourite place and what it is about it that they love. Ask them to write:

- What does it sound like?
- What does it feel like?
- What does it smell like?
- What does it look like?
- What do you hear there?
- What do you remember doing there?
- What do you love about it?
- Think about how much you love this place and why and write half a page on the one person or physical aspect of your special place that symbolises how much it means to you.

Conversely, ask students to think about place they despise and what it is that they hate about it. Ask them to write:

- What does it sound like?
- What does it feel like?
- What does it smell like?
- What does it look like?
- What do you hear there?
- What do you remember doing there?
- What do hate about it?

Think about how much you hate this place and why and write half a page on the one person or physical aspect of this place you despise that symbolises how much you loathe it.

Look at the map of the Island (Noepe or Martha's Vineyard) in the opening pages of the book. Identify where Great Harbor is, Nobnocket and Manitouwatootan. Find a map that shows where Martha's Vineyard is in relation to Cambridge, Massachusetts. How does the landscape affect Bethia and Caleb on the Island and on the mainland?

### Pre reading activities

#### 1. Discuss or brainstorm students prior knowledge of the time in which the book is set.

To assist discussion, you could look at these websites or play excerpts from some of these educational videos:

- National Museum of the American Indian: <http://nmai.si.edu/home/>
- Website of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head - [http://www.wampanoagtribe.net/pages/wampanoag\\_way/other](http://www.wampanoagtribe.net/pages/wampanoag_way/other)
- Excellent documentary from PBS first episode and trailer: *We shall remain* [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the\\_films/episode\\_1\\_trailer](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_1_trailer)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YR2FgxaICU>
- Transcript from the episode, explains what happened between the Wampanoag and the Puritans: [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/files/transcripts/WeShallRemain\\_1\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/files/transcripts/WeShallRemain_1_transcript.pdf)
- Background of the Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians and Others in North America: <http://www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0301>

#### Questions to encourage discussion:

- Who were the Puritans and what did they believe in?
- In what part of America did they settle?
- Did they invade or occupy American Indian land?
- What happened when they arrived?
- What was the impact for the American Indians?
- Did the American Indians resist the arrival of the Puritans?
- Is one person or group's religious or spiritual code superior? If so, why?
- Who owns land? Do Indigenous peoples have rights over the land that they occupy?

#### 2. Mindmap/brainstorm students understanding of the role that education plays in their

**lives.**

To start discussion, look at this extract from a recent Four Corners story on education in Australia entitled *Revolution in the Classroom*, where young people talk about the value of an education: <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2012/02/06/3421391.htm>

**Extract from transcript of the show:**

**Journalist:** So if I asked you in year seven, year eight, how important is education to you, what would've you said?

**Steven — Year 12 student:** I would've definitely said no, but probably in more blatant terms!

**Journalist:** Like what?

**Steven:** Waste of time, waste of money and waste of resourcing. Like we're working, making money.

**Journalist:** And I ask you that same question now, what does education mean to you now?

**Steven:** I think it's one of the most important things in the world. Like, without education you can't get nowhere, you can't have dreams, you can't have hopes because you don't have the knowledge to do anything with your life.

You could also look at this site as a class, and look at how important education is for Australian Indigenous communities from the website - Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation. [http://www.antar.org.au/issues\\_and\\_campaigns/education](http://www.antar.org.au/issues_and_campaigns/education)

**Ask the class:**

- Why are we educated?
- What is the purpose of education?
- Is education only what occurs in a school or a university?
- Where else does education occur?
- If you live in a world that values reading and writing is it important to be able to read and write? Why?
- Have any groups ever traditionally been excluded from formal education? Why?
- What do universities do?
- What could a university symbolise?
- How did/do societies that have an oral tradition, transmit their cultural beliefs?

**3. Create wikis to understand the political and historical contexts of the period in which it is set.**

The novel is set in early years of English settlement on the East coast of the United States. Starting with Wikipedia and using some of the resources listed below, ask students to create a wiki of the historical and political contexts of the novel. Divide the class into groups and ask students to research, write and create a wiki on the following topics. Tell the students that the wiki is intended for upper aged primary students. Ask the students to include visual materials such as archival photographs and maps to accompany the text. Write about 500 words. Present the wiki to the class.

**a) The Puritans/Pilgrims (a term that became popular from the 1800s)**

- Who were the group of English Puritans who left England to start a new life in the United States? Where did they come from?
- What did they believe? What role did religion play in their lives?
- Why did they go to the United States and what was their mission?
- Where did they settle?
- What was the name of the boat that they arrived in?
- Were there clearly defined roles between women and men? Did women and men have the same rights?
- Discuss the presence of American Indians in the area and what happened when the Puritans arrived and how they negotiated settlement of the land with the American Indians.

**For research:** Background of the Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians and Others in North America: <http://www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0301>

What came later: National Geographic webquest on Salem:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/salem/>

**b) The Wompanoag**

- Who are the Indigenous peoples of the United States?
- How long have they lived there?
- How are they grouped?
- Where did the Wompanoag live?
- Discuss the presence of Wompanoag in the area and what happened when the

Puritans arrived and how they negotiated settlement of the land with the American Indians.

- What were their political rights? Did they have any?

**For research:** <http://www.indians.org/articles/wampanoag-indians.html>

#### **Related texts**

*The Other Side of the Frontier* – Henry Renyolds

*The Crucible* – Arthur Miller

*The Secret River* – Kate Grenville

*The Mission* (1986) – dir by Roland Joffe

*The Tall Man* – Chloe Hooper

### **Reading the story**

#### **Part One - Anno 1660 - Aetatis Suae 15 - Great Harbor**

##### **Chapter One**

- Who is writing?
- Who is coming?
- What do you think of the language? Is it hard to understand? Why?
- Why does Bethia love the Island? What is it about the Island that Bethia loves?
- What does her Father think of the visitor? What does Makepeace think of the visitor?
- Bethia says she has killed her mother — why?

##### **Chapter Two**

- Who are the Wampanoag? What does Pastor Mayfield think of them? What does Bethia think of them — what do her views reveal about her?
- What is a salvage?
- How do Bethia and her Father define what Wampanoag means?
- What does this tell us about Bethia and her Father?

##### **Chapter Three**

- What do we learn about Bethia's community in the opening pages?
- Do you agree or disagree with Pastor Mayfield that women should not 'addle their brains by thinking on scholarly matters' and 'it is not seemly for a wife to know more than her husband'?



- What is *eshet chayil*? What does it mean? What does it tell us about Bethia? What may it be alluding to?
- Where is David's City?
- Why does Bethia love the countryside? What does it represent to her?
- Describe what Caleb looks like.
- What does Caleb show Bethia?
- Why does Bethia like spending time with Caleb?
- By spending time with Caleb what does Bethia learn about her own people?

#### **Chapter Four**

- What is the significance of the butchering of the beached whale? What could it mean for relations with the Wampanoag? Why is it described in such graphic detail? What is the effect on the reader? How does it impact on how you feel about Bethia's community?
- Why is Bethia so affected by listening to the Wampanoag celebrating? How does it make you feel about the Wampanoag?
- What has Bethia been taught about dancing?
- How does Bethia feel when she returns to the Beach?
- Have you ever witnessed something completely foreign but have been so moved it changed the way you looked at the world forever?
- What does Bethia do?

#### **Chapter Five**

- What is the name of Bethia's new friend?
- Why does the author start the chapter this way?
- What do we learn about him? What does his name mean?
- What is his relationship to his name?
- What does Bethia's name mean?
- Do you think they are ironic names?
- What is the significance of them renaming each other?
- Are Bethia and Caleb prejudiced? If so, in what ways? What does Bethia realise?

#### **Chapters Six - Seven**

- By spending time with Caleb, what does Bethia learn to do?
- What does Bethia teach Caleb?
- What is Bethia's dilemma?
- What does she want to do but think she can't or shouldn't?

- What do you think will be the implications of her decision?
- In turn, what does Caleb teach her?
- How does Bethia change by being with Caleb?
- How are Bethia and Caleb on similar paths?
- What do their societies expect of them as they become teenagers and move to adulthood?
- What does Bethia envy about Caleb?
- What does Caleb have to do?

### **Chapters Eight – Eleven**

- When Bethia writes, ‘I began to feel more and more like clay,’ what does she mean?
- Is she in love with Caleb or does she just want his freedoms?
- Why does she take the white hellebore? What is the significance?
- Do you think she would have done it if she was at home?
- Why does she think she has sinned?
- Is Bethia going to marry Noah?
- Is Caleb jealous?
- What does Pastor Mayfield hope if he succeeds in making Nahnosu well?
- Why is Nahnosu’s conversion important?
- Did Pastor Mayfield get his significant convert?
- Why did Nahnosu reject Christianity?
- What happens to the people who died from smallpox? How many died?
- Why does the author write about the deaths from smallpox so graphically?
- Why does Caleb come to live with the Mayfields?
- Do Bethia and Caleb have the same rights in the house?
- Who is Joel?

## **Part Two — Anno 1661 — Aetatis Suae 17 — Cambridge**

### **Chapter One**

- What has happened and where is Bethia?
- Why is the tone of this chapter different from the previous section?
- What does Caleb look like?
- What is the significance of Caleb’s hair being cut?
- Is Caleb an equal member of the Mayfield household?

- What do the wider community think?
- Why did Pastor Mayfield choose the reading from the Book of Ruth for Giles Aiden to read?
- Do the Pastor and Makepeace believe that the Wampanoag are equal?
- How does Caleb's presence in the Mayfield home, change the dynamic in the house?

#### **Chapter Two – Four**

- What does Bethia want?
- Why is there quite a lot of detail about the water well?
- What role does Joel play for Caleb?
- Why is there such a long passage about Solace?
- What does Bethia think about her life when she thinks about Solace?
- What do the family learn from Caleb?
- Is Caleb in love with Bethia?
- Does Bethia like living in Cambridge? How does she describe it?
- How has she changed since leaving the Island?
- How has Caleb changed?
- What does he no longer do?
- What does the passage of the Hebrews mean?
- What is Bethia grieving for?

#### **Chapters Five – Seven**

- Bethia determines to write more clearly, why?
- What is Bethia battling within herself?
- What is the tale of Odysseus?
- What is Caleb doing?
- What is the significance of his offering for Solace?
- Why does it make Bethia uncomfortable?
- Why does Bethia see Solace's death as a punishment?
- What sins has she committed?
- How does Pastor Mayfield change?
- What are Tequamuck and the Pastor fighting over?
- Why does the Pastor agree to go to England?

#### **Chapters Eight – Eleven**

- What does Tequamuck do at the beginning of the chapter? How does Makepeace respond?
- What does Pastor Mayfield's death allow Bethia to feel?
- Is Bethia's spirituality challenged with the death of her Father and Solace?
- How does the Island community mark his death?
- Why does Makepeace think that Tequamuck killed his father? What does he want to do? Does Bethia agree?
- What does Makepeace think about Caleb and his relationship with Bethia? Why is he so angry?
- What is going to happen to Makepeace and Bethia?
- What does indentured mean?
- How would you feel if you had to be indentured for a number of years to allow your sibling to continue their education?
- What are the options available for Bethia?
- Why does Bethia consent to the plan?
- How has Bethia changed from the beginning of the book?
- What do she and Caleb argue about?
- What is the nature of their relationship?
- Are they in love?
- Do they consider themselves like brother and sister?
- What can Caleb see that Bethia can't?
- How do his views differ from those of his uncle?
- Why doesn't Bethia want Caleb to call her Storm Eyes?
- What secrets do they share?
- Write a diary entry upon learning that one of your siblings has indentured you for three years.

### **Chapters Twelve – Fifteen**

- Why is there an Indian College? What is its purpose?
- Who is Anne Bradsheet?
- What does Dudley think about Indians being educated?
- What does Bethia think?
- What does Anne have access to but not Bethia?
- Why is Makepeace so angry with Bethia?
- Why is she so upset?

- What crime does Bethia commit? Do you think it is worthy of being labelled a crime?
- Who comes to her defence and offers a solution?
- Do you think Bethia and Samuel will get married? What is Bethia's first impression of Samuel? Do they share common interests and beliefs? What does Caleb think?
- What does Caleb believe the differences are between an English and Indian wife?
- What important question does Caleb ask?

### **Chapters Sixteen – Twenty**

- What does Goody Marsden ask Bethia to do?
- Who does Bethia defend? What does Caleb suggest?
- Who comes to Anne's aid?
- What does Goody Marsden allege?
- What do Bethia and Makepeace do?
- What do Bethia and Samuel argue about?
- What is Caleb so upset about?
- Do you think he is in love with Bethia?
- Bethia loves the Island but she also comes to love something else — what is it?
- What does she propose to Samuel?

### **Chapters Twenty one – Twenty five**

- How is Bethia's position at the College threatened?
- Is Caleb treated unfairly or differently at Harvard?
- How does the President treat him, does the way that he treat Caleb change?
- What does Bethia learn in the Buttery?

### **Part Three — Anno 1715 – Aetatis Suae — 70 Great Harbor**

- What did Bethia struggle with?
- What happens to Caleb? Who is Metacom?
- What happens to Joel?
- How does Caleb change from when he first met Bethia?
- How has Bethia changed?
- What is the war that she writes about?
- How did relations between the two communities change after the war?
- What does Bethia mean when she writes, 'it is an old story to me now.'

- Was the Indian college a cursed place? Do you agree?
- What do you think Bethia thinks about the English coming to America?
- Do you think she regrets her life? Regrets meeting Caleb? Regrets not having a different relationship with Caleb?
- What do you think about the last line? What does it tell us as readers?

### **Major themes and moral dilemmas in the novel**

Even though events in *Caleb's Crossing* take place in sixteenth century, the book raises many issues and questions that are relevant to our lives today. For example, can Indigenous cultures survive? Can Indigenous cultures survive while ever they are surrounded by another culture with different values and ideas? Can we accept that there are different ways of looking at the world and they are all equal at the same time? What happens when there is a cultural clash and different understanding of how land should be seen and used? Some of the themes and moral dilemmas raised in the book are:

### **Crossings**

Even though the book is entitled *Caleb's Crossing*, the book is bursting with all kinds of crossings.

It is about the crossing that Caleb makes from one world to another but it is also about the crossing that Bethia makes from young girl to woman, to finding a way she can live on her own terms; to learning that there is not just one way of looking at the world but other ways as well that are perhaps more compelling to her. The book is also about the cost of crossings as well. It shows that crossings are not always to the benefit of those making them.

In the last chapter of the book, Bethia looks back over her life and remembers the boy, 'at the edge of the pond,' and wonders if she should have mounted Speckle and 'ridden back to my own world and left him peace with his gods and spirits. Would he yet live, an old man now?' she asks (pp.409).

In her old age, rather than seeing the Indian College as a place for emancipation, she wonders if it is:

'the place that has proved itself the greatest thief of all ... since every Indian scholar who stayed within its walls perished untimely.' (pp. 408)

She asks her husband Samuel, if there will come a time again:

'... when the scars of war will heal, and the hearts of our people will soften again, one to the other, and other young Indians like Caleb and Joel, will take their places at Harvard. He

[Samuel] shook his head and said he cannot see such a thing in half a hundred years.' (pp. 409–410)

**Who are the rightful custodians of Noepe/Martha's Vineyard? What rights to Indigenous peoples have to maintain their traditional lands, customs and beliefs?**

This is a fundamental issue for all Indigenous peoples around the world and an issue that many countries continue to struggle with. What rights do Indigenous peoples have when their lands have been occupied by other groups of people? How do they maintain their culture in the wake of another more powerful group? How do Indigenous peoples view their land and the environment compared to their conquerors? Specifically in *Caleb's Crossing*, how do the English view their relationship and duty to the environment compared with the native Americans?

Over the time period of the book, we see Bethia's understanding of her people's place on the Island change. She writes that when she was young, 'I called them salvages, pagans, barbarians, the heathen.' (pp. 13). But as she gets to know Caleb, her understanding changes.

'We named the things of this place in reference to things that were not of this place — cat briar for the thickets of vine whose thorns were narrow and claw like; lambskill for the low-growing laurel ... But there had no cats or lambs here until we brought them. So when he named a plant or a creature, I felt that I heard the true name of the thing for the first time.' (pp. 32)

And:

'Because of him, the sea to me is no longer an opaque mystery, but a most useful lens.' (pp. 191)

By the end of the book, she wonders if she should have never have met Caleb and what his life would have been like, if he had been able to lead his own people.

She questions the rights of the English on the Island from the very beginning, but believes both groups can live side by side. She's not sure when her Father remarks that:

'...some now say that [the sonquem] did not fully understand that we meant to keep the land from them forever. Be that as it may, what's done is done and it was done lawfully.' (pp. 11)

She writes:

'I thought, but did not say, that grandfather could hardly have expected the fine points of English property law to count for much to some three thousand people whose reputation ... had been ferocious.' (pp. 11)

She and Caleb have an ongoing argument about what the future holds. Caleb's Uncle, wants to banish the English. Caleb reveals himself to be politically savvy, wanting to do what he can to ensure the survival of his people.

Caleb says:

"Can you not hear? Boots, boots and more boots. The shore groans under the weight, and yet more come. They crush the life from us."

"But Caleb," I said. "This land — I mean, the mainland — they say it is a vast wilderness — there is room and to spare even when we come many thousands ..."

He had scooped up another handful of sand and stared at each grain as it fell through his fingers.

"You are like these ... There is no end to them. You will pour across this land and we will be smothered ... We must find favour with your God, or die ... I say it is braver, sometimes, to bend ... That is why I will go now to the Latin school, and the college after, and if your God prospers me there, I will be of use to my people, and they will live." (pp. 191)

By the end of the novel, Bethia wishes she had left Caleb alone by the pond. How would you have felt? If you were Caleb? Bethia? Pastor Mayfield? Tequamuck?

- **Related material:**

Redfern Speech (Year for the World's Indigenous People) — Delivered in Redfern Park by Prime Minister Paul Keating, 10 December 1992:

[http://www.antar.org.au/issues\\_and\\_campaigns/self-determination/paul\\_keating\\_redfern\\_speech](http://www.antar.org.au/issues_and_campaigns/self-determination/paul_keating_redfern_speech)

- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, Parliament House, Canberra, 13 February 2008:

<http://www.indigenoustralia.info/component/content/article/1-latest/94-prime-minister-kevin-rudds-gsorryq-speech-12-february-2008.html>



### **Who is God? Is there only one God? - Conflicting perspectives**

Much of the book is about conflicting perspectives about who is God and whose God or spirits are more superior? At the beginning of the book, Bethia believes that there is one God, her God and one way to live. As the story progresses, she realises that there may not be just one way of seeing the world.

‘Of course, I thought it all outlandish. But... it came to me that our story of a burning bush and a parted sea might also seem fabulous, to one not raised up knowing it was true.’ (pp. 47)

By the end though, she remarks:

‘...even Samuel came to wonder if our austere form of worship was the only way to be godly.’ (pp.364)

### **Belonging- who belongs?**

Belonging is an underlying theme in the book. Caleb’s belongs to the Island. Bethia comes to love it when she can see it through Caleb’s eyes; the Island is where she belongs. Bethia is part of the Puritan settlement, yet can only belong if she behaves in a way seen fit for a woman.

- Caleb’s way of life has been challenged as a result of the arrival of the English, so he has to ask himself what of the future?
- How is he going to belong in this new world order?
- What does he have to do to safeguard the future of his people?
- Must he follow a similar path to his Uncle and resist the English or embrace them and learn what he can to guarantee to longevity of his people?

### **Characters and character development**

The characters in *Caleb’s Crossing* are complex. Describe in detail the characters of Bethia, her Father, Makepeace, Caleb at the beginning of the novel compared with what they are like at the end of the novel.

- Which people and events shaped and changed them throughout the course of the novel?
- What have they experienced over the course of the novel?

### **Bethia**

- What sin does Bethia think she has committed?
- Why does she think she killed her Mother?

**Get the students into groups to discuss: Love, marriage and the future**

The role for Bethia is very clearly defined. She is supposed to be a wife and Mother. Her mother advises her to be silent when necessary and her father advises against her being too educated otherwise she may be cleverer than her husband. Love is not part of the life equation. She is severely punished for speaking her mind, and speaking against her brother and she is indentured as a result of a deal between her Grandfather and Master Corlett. She does not always obey the rules though. Her best friend is an American Indian. She speaks her mind. She educates herself.

- What do you think?
- Has life changed completely for women since the 1600s?
- What were women supposed to want when your Grandmothers and mothers were teenagers?
- Were there things that their parents told them they could or could not do?
- What is it like now?
- Are women free to do whatever they want?
- To marry whoever they want?
- To go to university?
- To have a career?

**Get the students into groups to discuss: Freedom**

Ask your students to imagine that they have time travelled back to the 1600s. Ask them to come up with five social rules that the English girls on the Island would have to obey.

For example:

- Are they allowed to ride off on their own?
- Are they allowed to talk to or be alone with American Indians?
- Are they permitted to say what they think whenever they want?
- What will happen to them if they speak their minds or speak ill of any of the male members of their families?

Feedback to the class and come up with the five best rules.

Then, ask the class to imagine that Bethia time travels to the present. Ask the class to come up with

five social rules between men and women in the present day. Feed back to the class and come up with the five best rules.

### **How an author tells their story — narration**

1. Ask students to write a diary entry about someone they are in love with, that their families have forbidden them from seeing. Write about a romantic encounter with this person. Write with abandon because you know that no-one is ever going to see what they write. Share with the class.
2. Ask students to write another diary entry about the same romantic encounter with the person but be conscious that a member of your family may find your diary. Share with the class. Discuss. Did what you write from the first and second entry differ? Why? What are you mindful of? What details did you leave out?

If you are thinking about audience or who may read your writings, what you write may change. This is true for an author as well. By choosing to write in first person, the focalisation of a novel changes immediately. The story can only be written through the eyes of the narrator. If that fictional narrator is conscious of audience, that can also change what she writes about. First person narrators are always unreliable narrators.

In *Caleb's Crossing*, Bethia is the book's narrator. The book is her diary. We see the world through Bethia's eyes; with all her shortcomings and passions. What evidence in the book, can you find that shows that she an unreliable narrator? Is what she tells us a true account of events? How would Makepeace's account of the same period of time differ, for example?

What does this entry tell us about what Bethia thinks about who are the rightful custodians of the Island?

'We named the things of this place in reference to things that were not of this place – cat briar for the thickets of vine whose thorns were narrow and claw like; lambskill for the lowgrowing laurel ... But there had no cats or lambs here until we brought them. So, when he named a plant or a creature, I felt that I heard the true name of the thing for the first time.'

(pp. 32)

How might Makepeace see the same thing? We all see things through our own prism of desires and

prejudices. As readers we need to think about the information being presented to us, about the images and ideas the narrator is presenting to us and how she or he writes about them. We need to understand the persuasive techniques at play that shape how we think of the narrator and her world view.

Another example of Bethia as an unreliable narrator is her relationship with Caleb. We don't know as readers what the truth is regarding Bethia's relationship with Caleb. Are they more than friends? Were they ever lovers? We don't know. There are clues, suggestions, partial admissions and denials. For example, before Caleb agrees to go and live with the Mayfields, Bethia writes:

'I felt the heat of his breath, the hint of his lips, and then he let the hand go, reaching for a strand of my hair. The pins had fallen, and it hung, loose and damp, almost to my waist ... He fingered the strand and let it fall...' (pp. 190)

Is this how someone typically writes about their best friend or is this how we write about someone we are in love with?

And earlier, she says:

'My mind was brimming with corrupt fantasies ... I thought of that familiar chestnut-brown body, pared by ordeal, naked in the darkness. And of Satan, in his serpent form, twining about those bruised thighs, hissing out his tempting promises of potency.' (pp. 74)

Is she talking about Satan or something else? Is Satan a metaphor for her forbidden desire?

Read this extract from a recent interview Geraldine Brooks did with Jennifer Byrne:

**JENNIFER BYRNE:** 'She, Bethia, is this plucky girl desperate for a decent education, and of independent mind. He is this physically beautiful young man. Were you not tempted, Geraldine, just to bring them together? Give us a romance!'

**GERALDINE BROOKS:** 'I was so tempted. I was totally tempted, and also, remember this. This is what Bethia sets down in her memoir. So, is she telling us what she really felt, or is she an unreliable narrator at some points?'

**JENNIFER BYRNE:** 'Don't ask me! ... Is she an unreliable narrator at some points?'

**GERALDINE BROOKS:** 'I think she might be.'

From a recent interview with Jennifer Byrne, on The Tuesday Book Club,

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s3278088.htm>

## Language

One of the ways that Brooks creates intimately drawn characters and a profound sense of place and time is her wonderful use of language and cadence. Words and language matter in this book; they are central to an understanding of the novel. There are English words, Calvinist/Puritan perspectives, American Indian words and ideas, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew words, passages from the Bible — conflicting perspectives and points of view; all vying for supremacy, attention and understanding at once. In *Caleb's Crossing* words are impregnated with meaning.

To get to the heart of the book requires some effort by the reader. The story is surrounded by long descriptive sentences, written with a particular cadence, using words and phrases that we as readers may not be familiar with. We have to ask ourselves why? Why is the book written this way? What does this tell us about the author and the narrator? What is the effect on the reader?

**GERALDINE BROOKS:** 'I love to get the language right, and it's like... it's almost like a little treasure hunt for me. So, you know, at one point Bethia is learning about midwifery, and I needed to talk about a foetus, and I'm pretty sure she's not going to be using the word 'foetus', so I go to my favourite reference book, which is the Oxford Historical Thesaurus Of The English Language, and you can look up 'foetus', and they'll give you every word that's ever been used for it right down to Old English, and you can go to mid-17th century and find out that the word she would have used is 'shapeling'.'

**JENNIFER BYRNE:** "Shapeling"?'

**GERALDINE BROOKS:** 'Mmm. And immediately you put that word into her mouth, and you're back in the 17th century.'

From a recent interview with Jennifer Byrne, on The Tuesday Book Club,

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s3278088.htm>

Unlocking the meaning of the words and phrases takes us the heart of the story and takes us into another time. The effort that is required to wrap our tongues around words and concepts we may not understand, interestingly, mirrors some of the major themes of the book. Language impacts on meaning; shapes how we understand a text. Working individually, or as a group, find challenging words in the text and write out the meaning and effect of each word or phrase, in your own words.

Word, idea or phrase	Meaning and effect
Original Sin	
White hellebore	
Patent to the island	
sonquem	
paganism	
Forbidden fruit	
faciunt	
Eve	
Wampanoag	
indigent	
pawaaw	
Nipmuc	
Peqyot	
abecedarian	
Aetatis Suae	
Wampanaontoaonk	
Trinity graduate	
The Buttery	
chirurgoun	
Takemmy	
Noepe	

To illustrate how language can change meaning in a book, in pairs, think and write down ten phrases and words that indicate that you are writing as a teenager in 2012. What kind of words and phrases indicate the present?

Look at language in *Caleb's Crossing* in at least two to three chapters. Identify the literary techniques, give examples from the text and discuss the effectiveness of the techniques and how they influence you as a reader.

### **Cadence**

From the opening lines of the novel we time travel back into the past. The rhythm of the sentences and the words used suggest an authorial voice that is not of the present but of someone from the past. For example, the first line of the book reads:

'He's coming on the Lord's Day. Though my father has not seen fit to give me the news, I have the whole of it.'

What day is the Lord's Day? Who uses such a term? Is such a term used these days?

How would we say the second line — 'Dad hasn't told me, but I know the truth.' Why is this line written this way? Again, what does it tell us about the narrator and what time we are in?

Cadence is central to the characterisation of Bethia. Her environment is so controlled and she is expected to exercise self control which she struggles with. Her language reflects her internal struggle. For example, she writes about major events such as the death of her Mother and her sister with an air of detachment, which the language reinforces. For example:

'My own body had begun to ebb and flow with the moon.' (pp. 48)

And:

'That spring, mother went to her childbed and did not rise from it.' (pp. 105)

'Listening, not speaking, has been my way. I have become most proficient in it. My mother taught me the use of silence.' (pp. 4)

However, whenever she writes about what and how she loves the island, the cadence transforms. The landscape awakens her soul. For example, she writes:

'I love the fogs that wreathe us all in milky veils, and the winds that moan and keen in the chimney piece at night. Even when the wrack line is crusted with salty ice, and the ways through the woods crunch under my clogs, I drink the cold air in the low, blue gleam that sparkles on the snow. Every inlet and outcrop of this place, I love.' (pp. 8)

Further, on those occasions when she cannot listen in silence as her Mother advised, and speaks her

mind directly, it is like a thunderbolt, and there are grave consequences. Find the parts in the novel in which Bethia speaks her mind and explain what happens as a result.

### **Visual literacy analysis of *Caleb's Crossing***

#### **The Cover**

Ask the students to look at the cover of the book.

Get them to predict what they think it is about. Guide them with the following questions and then get them to answer the remaining ones on their own.

1. What century do you think the story takes place?
2. What is the mood? Is the subject gazing at the responder? Is the subject turned away? What is the effect?
3. How is the image positioned? Is the responder positioned to have sympathy for the figure in the picture?
4. Whose point of view is captured in the shot? How is the responder positioned?
5. Is there a close up or long shot used? How does the social distance impact on the responder?
6. What kinds of colours are used? What feelings do you think they are intended to inspire in the responder? Is one colour accented over another? Is there a clear division of tones?
7. What is the most salient feature on the cover?
8. How does the text work with the images on the cover? How does it influence the responder?
9. What are the other visual elements in the text? How do they add to the themes of the book?
10. Does the cover convey a sense of belonging or not belonging? How?