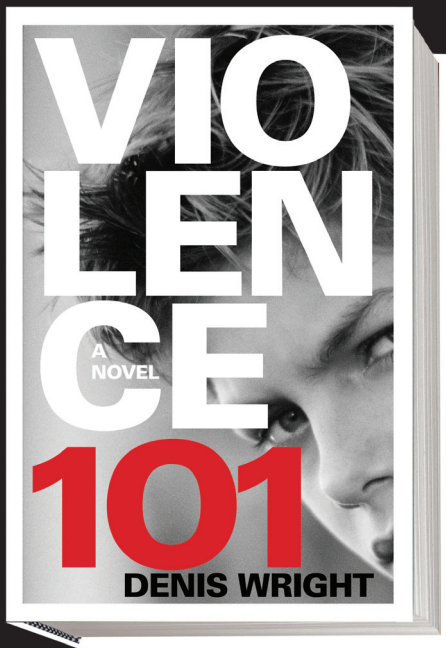


# A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR **VIOLENCE 101** BY DENIS WRIGHT

**MY NAME IS HAMISH GRAHAM. SOMETIMES I DO VERY VIOLENT THINGS AND I AM TOO YOUNG TO BE PUT IN JAIL.**

978-0-399-25493-2 (HC) • \$16.99 • Ages 14 up • Grades 9 up



## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Hamish Graham, a violent yet highly intellectual fourteen-year-old obsessed with war and military heroes, finds himself in yet another boys' home. Too young for jail, Hamish has already brutally killed and maimed animals and pushed an elderly man to his death. On a clear course to self-destruction, Hamish expects the staff at Manukau New Horizons Boys' Home to be like the others—unintelligent individuals who don't understand him.

Told in alternating narratives—including mesmerizing journal entries written in Hamish's voice—*Violence 101* paints a disturbing yet utterly compelling picture of an extremely bright, extremely misguided adolescent who must navigate a world that encourages aggressive behavior at every turn, but also struggles to help a young man who can't tell when to draw the line between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

DENIS WRIGHT lives in Wellington, the capital city of New Zealand. He is an English teacher in an inner city high school. He is married to Julie, a librarian (of course), and has two great sons, who, like most New Zealanders, are intelligent and sport obsessed. *Violence 101* is his first novel.

## **BEFORE YOU READ THE NOVEL, VIOLENCE 101, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:**

- What role does violence play in our society? Do you believe society has a clear understanding of violence?
- Does violence ever bring about good things? Explain.
- What causes rage in a young person who has had a seemingly normal and comfortable childhood?
- Why would a troubled teen plot a deliberate course of self-destruction?
- Are there mistakes we make for which there is no restitution? Explain.
- What characteristics do successful therapists and/or teachers of troubled adolescents need?
- What are your pet peeves? Are there characteristics in others you find irritating? If so, how do you manage your frustration?



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- What attitude does Hamish have about staying in the New Horizons Boys' Home? Why?
- The author uses both third-person narrative and first-person journal/diary writing to tell the story. Each gives the reader a different perspective. What does he achieve by using both points of view?
- Which staff worker has the best understanding of Hamish? The least? Compare and contrast Simon Whittle and Terry Swanson and their abilities to understand Hamish and others like him.
- Hamish is prepared for his first encounter in the cafeteria with the boys. Hamish is skinny and appears unthreatening, whereas, Victor is large and imposing. How has Hamish learned to survive around tough kids? Describe his "radar" for trouble.
- The principal, Helen Greenville, believes Hamish has a calming effect on the other boys and that there has been less hassle and conflict since Hamish's arrival. Do you believe this is true? What changes does Hamish bring about with the boys? Why?
- Why is Hamish obsessed with military heroes and war? He identifies several heroes whom he admires: Alexander the Great, Charles Upham, and Te Rauparaha are three he frequently mentions. What does he admire about each?
- Hamish has been accused of hating women. Does he? Explain.
- What do readers know about Hamish's relationship with his parents? How does he feel about them? How have they tried to help him? Could they have prevented Hamish from ending up in a boys' home?
- Hamish is highly intellectual and is quick to label people as being "dumb." Why do you think unintelligent people irritate him?
- Why do you think Hamish set out to climb Girdlestone Peak in the dead of winter? Why does he leave evidence of his whereabouts in the letter to Terry Swanson and Toko Wihongi?
- On his way to the mountain, Hamish is given a lift by Trev Mitchell, an older gentleman who recognizes Hamish's anger and troubled soul. What impact does this brief encounter have on Hamish? What does the reader learn about Hamish from this interaction?
- Locate a passage and/or scene that gave you the deepest insight into the source of Hamish's anger. Explain what you learned from the passage/scene.
- The author does a superb job maintaining distance between Hamish and the reader throughout most of the book by having Hamish narrate his experiences in a detached, unemotional voice; however, the reader is drawn to Hamish as he struggles to stay alive on the mountain. How does Hamish's voice change in these last pages?
- Why does Hamish take interest in Mr. Wihongi's reason for being at the boys' home? Hamish says he is climbing the mountain for Mr. Wihongi. What does he mean?
- It would be easy to label Hamish as a sociopath. What evidence in the story suggests such a label might be oversimplified?
- Do you think Hamish is capable of functioning in our society as an adult? How does it make you feel to know that people like Hamish exist in the world?

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