



BOY X BY DAN SMITH


Boy X is a fast-paced jungle adventure featuring a reluctant hero and an intelligent and a capable heroine. During their adventure, they form a strong friendship and are forced to make some life-changing decisions.

Kidnapped and drugged, Ash McCarthy wakes up to find himself in what appears to be an empty research facility. In bare feet and a pair of pyjamas, he sets out to search for his mum but when he reaches the exit, he discovers that he is far from home. Ash meets Isabel who explains that they are on Isla Negra - a jungle island off the coast of Costa Rica. Together, they head back into the building only to discover that Ash's mum and Isabel's dad - both genetic scientists - have been imprisoned in a lab and infected with a deadly virus known as Kronos. In twenty-four hours, it will be too late to save them, and they will die. Their only hope is the anti-virus, Zeus, but the people who locked them in the lab have stolen Zeus, and are escaping across the island, taking with them a key card which is the only way to unlock the lab.

Ash and Isabel set out to cross the jungle and find the men responsible. They have twenty-four hours to catch up with them, find the keycard, and find Zeus. Fortunately, Isabel knows how to survive in the jungle, and she can help Ash overcome the wilderness, but this is no ordinary jungle. For years, Isla Negra has been used for unchecked genetic experimentation, and everything on the island is strange. The animals are bigger and more dangerous than usual. The trees and plants are like nothing Ash has ever seen. And the longer he spends on the island, the more Ash begins to notice that he feels different. His sense are heightened and he feels fitter and stronger than before. And there's something else . . . why are the animals watching him? Why are the howler monkeys gathering in the trees above him? And why does he feel like he's been to this island before?

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WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS . . .

I've always loved jungle thrillers - here the forest becomes a character of its own, dangerous and wild. The sense of threat is heightened in *Boy X* as frightening animals prowl in the corners of your eyes, flitting between the trees . . . The mystery and excitement are pitch-perfect and, like Dan's readers everywhere, I feel it's me caught up in the adventure, trying to outguess the twists and turns in the plot. Get ready to be excited and intrigued!

BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Growing up, I led three lives. In one I survived the day-to-day humdrum of boarding school, while in another I travelled the world, finding adventure in the paddy fields of South East Asia and the jungles of Brazil. But the third life I lived in a world of my own, making up stories . . . which is where some people say I still live most of the time!

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

When I was growing up, I was lucky enough to live in some amazing places, and something that was almost always present for me was the jungle. It had a huge impact on me, so it's inevitable that I would want to write about it. The jungle can be a scary place, but I wanted it to be **really** scary for my hero, Ash McCarthy, so I created a jungle on a mysterious island, where everything is bigger and more dangerous than it should be. Then I gave him just twenty-four hours to cross the island and save the world. The result is a story that needs exclamation marks ... Danger! Action! Adventure! Survival!

DESCRIBE BOY X IN THREE WORDS . . .

Action. Survival. Terror.



THEMES

- Bravery and Courage
- Friendship
- Survival
- Perseverance
- Genetic Experimentation
- Mystery
- The Jungle
- The Environment

WRITING STYLE

Boy X is an exciting adventure story set in a vivid jungle location, featuring a reluctant hero and an intelligent and capable heroine. The writing is descriptive and fast-paced, with short chapters and cliff-hangers to keep the reader on the edge of their seat, wanting to know what happens next. The mystery at the heart of the story is slowly revealed, along with several twists that keep the reader guessing right until the end. There is a strong message about family and friendship, and about perseverance in the face of impossible odds. Boy X mixes a variety of genres including action, mystery, sci-fi, and thriller.



I am a firm believer in reading for pleasure, and I am not suggesting that after reading every chapter of a book, students should carry out a task and analyse the text. Sometimes it is better to simply discuss how readers feel about the story, or to maintain the momentum of the story and keep on reading. However, in the following pages, you will find some suggested activities based on selected chapters of Boy X. I have mostly concentrated on the chapters in the first half of the book. At the end of this document I have included some more general ideas for tasks, and some proposed research to enrich specific aspects of the story.

Please feel free to use these tasks in any way that suits your students, and your enjoyment of Boy X.





RAINFOREST RESEARCH PROJECT

When I was growing up, I was lucky enough to spend a lot of time in the rainforest, so I didn't need to do a huge amount of research to make my rainforest feel real. But not everyone has been to the rainforest.

Ask students to make a poster advertising an adventure holiday to the rainforest. Here are a few things to help them start their research.

- Which countries have the most rainforest?
- What kind of animals would you find?
- What kind of plants would you find?
- How would you get there?
- What is there to see?
- Where might you stay?
- What would you do in the rainforest?



1. CHAPTERS 1-3 (PAGES 1-20)

Writing Emotion

In the opening chapters of Boy X, Ash McCarthy wakes up in a strange place. When he investigates, he goes outside to discover that he is in the jungle! Ask students to imagine they are Ash. How would they feel in this situation? Would they be excited? Afraid? Intrigued? Confused? Ask students to write a short piece of prose describing how they would feel. Encourage them to use strong, emotive words and imagery.

2. CHAPTERS 1-3 (PAGES 1-20)

Character Chart

By now, students should have an impression of Ash's character. Ask students what are their first impressions of Ash. What kind of a person do they think he is? Using **'inference'** and **'deduction'** what can they find in the chapter that supports their view of Ash?

(**'Inference'** is an interpretation that goes beyond the literal information given. **'Deduction'** is an understanding based on evidence given in the text.)

Quotation	What does it tell us about Zak?
He kept his eyes fixed on the identity disc; the one thing that could make him feel strong.	Ash needs something to help him feel strong and brave.



3. CHAPTER 4 (PAGES 21-28)

Engaging the reader

This chapter is full of action. I wanted it to be tense, exciting, and scary. Ask students to think about how I have used my writing to engage the reader. Consider sentence length, paragraph length, sentence structure, character reactions, punctuation, sound, dialogue, repetition etc.

4. CHAPTERS 5 - 6 (PAGES 29-42)

Using Your Senses

In these chapters, Ash and Isabel go deeper into the BioSphere. The power is off and the building is in complete darkness. They both feel very scared. Ask students if they know what it is like to be in total darkness. If possible, students could be blind-folded and try to find their way around the classroom. Ask students to imagine they can't see, then write a short piece of prose describing what they feel, hear, and smell as they they make their way around the classroom - or perhaps a different, more dangerous environment . . .

5. CHAPTER 7 (PAGES 43-46)

Comprehension

After reading this short chapter, students could either answer these questions themselves, or they could be discussed as a class.

1. In the first paragraph I write "Ash was afraid and repulsed all at once.' What does 'repulsed' mean?
2. How does Ash know that the dead body is not Isabel's papa?
3. On page 44, Isabel's 'words wavered when she spoke.' What do you think this means? And what does it tell us about how Isabel is feeling?
4. Why does Ash try to be as quiet as possible when he is searching for the key card?
5. What is Ash wearing?
6. What is the 'red eye' that Ash sees in the dark?



6. CHAPTER 8 (PAGES 47-60)

Newspaper Report

In this chapter Ash and Isabel discover that their parents are locked in the lab and have been infected with a deadly virus called Kronos. In twenty-four hours they will begin to die if they do not get the anti-virus, Zeus. Ask students to imagine that Kronos has been released into the atmosphere. How was it released? Who contracted the virus first? How quickly would it spread around the world? *How* might it spread? Ask students to write a newspaper report about the virus, how it is spreading around the world, the effect it is having, and the effect it will have as time passes.

7. CHAPTER 9, 23:45 UNTIL SHUT-DOWN (PAGES 60-70)

Continuing The Story . . .

This chapter ends on page 70 with the words 'I think you kids better let me take over now.' Ask students to imagine they are the author. What happens next? Continue the story using strong, dramatic verbs to capture the action.

8. CHAPTER 10, 23:09 UNTIL SHUT-DOWN (PAGES 71-79)

Cool Gadgets

In this chapter, Ash and Isabel use the HEX13. HEX13 is not real, it's something I made up because I thought it would add something exciting to the story. Discuss other types of cool gadgets that they think might be useful for Ash and Isabel. Ask students to design, draw, and label their own gadgets to help our heroes escape the BioSphere!



9. CHAPTER 11-12 (PAGES 80-91)

Diary Entry

As Ash is escaping from the BioSphere, something strange happens to him - time seems to slow down. I wrote this section in that way because I wanted to give the sense that Ash's reactions are becoming faster, so he sees things as if they are slower than normal. He dodges and twists through the falling glass. Can students think of anything else strange that seems to be happening to Ash in these two chapters and before? Ask students to write bullet points for all of the things they can think of, then imagine they are Ash, and write a diary entry about what is happening to them and how it makes them feel.

10. CHAPTER 13 (PAGES 92-101)

Jungle Kit

In this chapter, Isabel collects all the things she thinks she will need when she goes into the jungle. As a class, discuss what you think someone might need to survive in the jungle. Think about how you will find water, food, how much you can carry, how far you will have to travel, what the temperature and weather will be like. What might you need to build a shelter, make a fire etc? Make a list of all the things you think you will need, with a description of why you need it. You could make a survival booklet, or a fact sheet about jungle survival. You could investigate stories about real people who have survived in the jungle for a long time - how did they manage to stay alive? If your students were only allowed to take five items into the jungle, what would they take?



11. CHAPTER 14, 21:03 UNTIL SHUT-DOWN (PAGES 102-110)

Using Imagery

Writers try to use original imagery to make their writing more interesting. In this chapter, I write 'but immediately around them was a cocoon of silence.' I used this imagery to give the sense of the rainforest being strange, and of Ash and Isabel being apart from the rest of the world. Discuss SIMILE, METAPHOR, and PERSONIFICATION with students, then ask them to use those concepts to invent original imagery for the nouns in the table below.

Jungle	
Sunshine	
The heat	
The trees	
Tree branches	
Caterpillar	
The dark	
The island	



12. CHAPTER 15, 20:02 UNTIL SHUT-DOWN (PAGES 111-121)

Create a Monster!

In this chapter, Ash and Isabel meet a ferocious, monstrous wild boar. Huge wild boars really do exist, but I imagined this one as even bigger than normal, and far more dangerous. Because Isla Negra has been used for genetic experimentation, many of the animals that live there are different from the ones that might usually be found in the jungle. Ask students to design, draw, and label their own genetically mutated monster. It could be a bigger, more dangerous version of an animal that exists, or it could be a combination of more than one animal. Encourage students to let their imaginations run wild!

13. CHAPTER 16, 19:15 UNTIL SHUT-DOWN (PAGES 122-131)

Interview

As they make their way through the jungle, it becomes clear that Isabel is infected with the virus. But she is strong and brave, and she keeps going. Ask students to write an interview with Isabel, asking her how she felt, and what helped her to stay strong. How did she feel about leading Ash through the jungle? What was she most scared about? How did she feel when she lost her backpack?

14. CHAPTER 18, 18:28 UNTIL SHUT-DOWN (PAGES 136-144)

Conquering Fear

Ash is afraid of a lot of things - especially heights. Ask students to write about a time when they were afraid. What happened? What were they afraid of? What did they do? How did they deal with it? Did they overcome their fear or did their fear get the better of them? Did someone help them?



15. CHAPTER 19, 18:14 UNTIL SHUT-DOWN (PAGES 145-149)

Writing Action

When Ash and Isabel are crossing the river on the rope and pulley system, the rope snaps and they plunge into the rapids. We see the action from Ash's point of view (known as POV), as he tries to save himself. But what happens to Isabel? Ask students to imagine they are Isabel, then write a short piece of prose describing what happened to her when she fell into the river. Encourage them to use strong, dramatic, and exciting verbs and adjectives to describe what happens. Use imaginative imagery to describe the water, the rocks, and the fear!

GENERAL TASKS

- Ash changes dramatically over the course of the story. His appearance changes, his character changes, and he gains some new abilities. Ash refers to himself as Ash 'Plus'. Ask students to write a list of a) Ash's characteristics at the beginning of the book, and b) Ash's characteristics at the end of the book. Then, in a short piece of prose, students can write a character description of Ash using either list a or list b.
- Ask students to imagine they are Ash, and write a letter to their best friend telling them about their adventure on Isla Negra.
- It can be difficult to think of a great, catchy title for a book or story. Do students think that 'Boy X' is a good title for this book? What does 'Boy X' mean to them? If they had to think of a new title for the book, what would it be, and why?
- We are told not to judge a book by its cover, but cover designs are hugely important. Ideally, the cover tells the reader something about the kind of story they are going to find inside the pages. Ask students to spend some time looking at book covers and thinking about what the designer has tried to do. Then ask students to design an alternative cover for Boy X.
- Ask students to draw a map of Isla Negra, and mark all the key places - e.g. The BioSphere, Isabel's house, the bunker, the river, the abandoned house, the beach . . .

GENERAL TASKS

- In a story, writers create drama using a few important tools. Every character must want something - this is their **motivation** - and often there is something standing in their way, preventing them from getting what they want - the **obstacle**. A character can have an overriding motivation which lasts for the duration of the story (e.g. Ash wants to save his mum's life), and they can have smaller motivations that last for the duration of a few scenes (e.g. Ash wants to cross the river). Choose a scene from the book and ask students to identify the motivation of the characters, and then decide what is standing in their way.
- Ask students to write a review of Boy X. What is the main story? Who are the main characters? What do the main characters want? What happens to them? What did students like about the story? What did they **not** like about the story?
- At the end of the book, the reader discovers that Thorn is still alive, and that he wants to 'find Ash McCarthy'. According to the text, 'There was nowhere on earth the boy would be able to hide from him.' Ask students how they feel about this ending. Do they like a book to end in a way that suggests the story is on-going, or do they like all the strands of a story to be wrapped up? Boy X ends in a way that suggests Ash McCarthy's story is not over. Ask students to write the first (short) chapter of a sequel to Boy X.



FURTHER RESEARCH

- Rainforest covers a large part of our planet. Look at where we can find rainforests. What do they need to survive? What lives there? How do rainforests benefit the environment? Why are rainforests in danger? What can we do to protect rainforests?
- In Boy X, Ash and Isabel are followed by howler monkeys. Ash is scared when he first hears them howling. See what you can find out about howler monkeys. Where do they live? What do they eat? See if you can find video/audio of them howling. What other kinds of animals live in the rainforest?
- In Boy X, there is a deadly virus called Kronos. What can you find out about viruses? What are they? What can they do? Are all viruses bad?
- At the end of Boy X, Ash zip-lines onto a beach of 'shining black sand'. Is there such a thing as black sand? Where might you find a black sand beach, and why might the sand be black?
- In Boy X, Ash and Isabel encounter a huge column of ants. How many different kinds of ants are there? Where do ants live? Do ants benefit our planet, or are they just a nuisance?
- Ash and Isabel have to survive alone in the jungle. Can you find any real-life stories about people who have survived alone in the jungle? How long were they in the jungle? How did they manage to survive?
- BioMesa is involved in genetic experimentation. What is genetic experimentation? What are the benefits, and what are the dangers of genetic experimentation?

