

Picnic at Hanging Rock



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOAN LINDSAY

Joan Lindsay was born into a prominent Australian family just a few years before the turn of the 20th century. She described her childhood as “uneventful,” and was raised in a mansion called St. Margaret’s just outside Melbourne. At 13 she was sent to boarding school—during her years at the Melbourne girls’ school, the institution changed names and ownership. Despite the turbulence at school, Lindsay was regarded as a good student and excelled in art. Lindsay went on to study at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School in Melbourne and married a fellow art student named Daryl Lindsay in 1922. The two remained together during the fallow and unpredictable years of the Great Depression, renting out their large Mulberry Hill house to make ends meet. As her husband’s painting career took off, Lindsay began focusing on writing novels and plays, receiving great acclaim for her satirical novel *Through Darkest Ponderay*, a book which lampooned the then-popular genre of sensationalist travel literature. In 1943, Daryl became the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, and in 1956, he was knighted. In 1967, Joan Lindsay published her most popular and enduring work, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The novel was written and marketed as a true story, though there is no historical record or evidence of a disappearance of four schoolgirls ever taking place at the famed rock. The novel was a sensation in Australia and abroad—for the rest of her life, Lindsay would constantly dodge questions from her reading public and from her work’s adaptors (including Peter Weir, who made a 1975 feature film based on the novel) about the tale’s authenticity and the novel’s ambiguous ending. After her husband’s death, Lindsay continued writing and resumed painting. She died of cancer in 1984, and, in 1987, an excised final chapter of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* revealing a strange sci-fi twist was published posthumously.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The geological formation and former volcano now known as Hanging Rock is an ancient maelstrom long sacred to several Aboriginal Australian tribes: the Djadja Wurrung, Wurundjeri, and Taungurong. The rock is believed to have once been an important place for inter-tribal meetings, and may have also served as the demarcation of the place where the tribes’ boundaries met. As English colonialists settled Victoria and its surrounding areas in the mid-19th century, they cruelly brutalized, killed and removed these tribes, many of whom had lived on the land for tens of thousands of years, from their ancestral land. The Aboriginal name for the formation remains

uncertain—though some believe that an inscription on the rock reading “Anneyelong” may refer to an indigenous word, perhaps *Ngannelong*. Settlers renamed the formation Diogenes Mount shortly after their conquest of the area. Its more recognizable contemporary name, Hanging Rock, refers to a distinctive pair of rocks which hang over the path up to the mount’s summit, forming a kind of bridge. Hanging Rock is now a public reserve which charges entry for visitors wishing to visit the site. Many have drawn parallels between the history of Hanging Rock and the history of The Six Grandfathers, or Mount Rushmore—a 20th-century project which saw the faces of four American presidents carved into the side of a sacred mountain in Keystone, South Dakota’s Black Hills, once the territory of the Lakota Sioux. Artists and activists in Australia such as Amy Spiers, creator of the “Miranda Must Go” campaign (a reference to a statue of Joan Lindsay’s character Miranda, one of the lost schoolgirls, which stands at the Hanging Rock Visitor’s Centre) have enacted protests to de-center tourism in the area and reeducate visitors as to the site’s sacredness and significance to Australia’s indigenous people.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Picnic at Hanging Rock represents the confluence of several literary and ideological influences in which Joan Lindsay was interested throughout her career as a writer and painter. Lindsay’s first novel, *Through Darkest Ponderay*, was a satirical pseudo-travelogue written in an epistolary, or letter-writing, format. In the novel, two English ladies visit an island off the coast of Sri Lanka which is inhabited by cannibals and must face down a series of trials and tribulations. The book, a send-up of sensationalist and racist tropes of the popular autobiographical travel narrative genre, is in many ways an ideological precursor to *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s treatment of tourists who visit a sacred indigenous site—and have a very different experience than they’d bargained for. Time and its bizarre, halting flow is also a major motif throughout the novel—Joan Lindsay is said to have been humorously aware throughout her life of the fact that clocks and watches often stopped in her presence, and even wrote an autobiographical account of the early days of her marriage entitled *Time Without Clocks*. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has also influenced a number of contemporary titles including Felicity McLean’s *The Van Apfel Girls are Gone*, which charts the disappearance of a trio of sisters in the summer of 1992, and Jeffrey Eugenides’s *The Virgin Suicides*, in which a group of high-school boys find themselves fascinated by an ethereal group of five religious—and suicidal—sisters.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Picnic at Hanging Rock
- **When Written:** A two-week period in the mid-1960s
- **Where Written:** Mulberry Hill, Langwarrin South, Victoria, Australia
- **When Published:** 1967
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction; Pseudohistory; Science Fiction
- **Setting:** Mount Macedon, Victoria, Australia
- **Climax:** Irma Leopold, Miranda, Marian Quade, and Miss McCraw disappear during a Valentine's Day excursion to Hanging Rock.
- **Antagonist:** Mrs. Appleyard
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Let's Do the Time Warp. Though Joan Lindsay's editors cut the final chapter of her original draft of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, it was published posthumously in a standalone volume. The "hidden" chapter reveals that halfway through their climb up Hanging Rock, Irma, Miranda, and Marion began feeling strange. They watched their math teacher, Greta McCraw, disappear through a crack in the rock after turning into a crablike creature. After taking off their own corsets and throwing them off the side of the rock, the girls watched their corsets suspended in the air for several seconds before following Miss McCraw through the hole. When Irma tried to pass through the hole, it shut before her, and she went temporarily mad. This ending suggests that the rock is home to a kind of time warp or wormhole, a twist which speaks to Lindsay's own artistic fascination with clocks and time, as well as Aboriginal Australian beliefs about the rock as a sacred place.



PLOT SUMMARY

On February 14, 1900 (Saint Valentine's Day) a group of schoolgirls from Appleyard College near the township of Mount Macedon, Australia prepare giddily for a picnic at **Hanging Rock**. Mrs. Appleyard, the founder and headmistress of the school, advises the girls to be on their best behavior. Greta McCraw, the math teacher, and Mademoiselle Dianne de Poitiers, the French teacher, chaperone the trip. Mr. Ben Hussey, the owner of a local cab company, drives the group in a horse-drawn drag. He promises to have the group back no later than eight o'clock that evening. At the picnic grounds, the group enjoys food, tea, and an afternoon of dozing in the sun. Mr. Hussey notices that his watch has stopped—in order to make sure they're back on time, he suggests that the group leave in about an hour. When a group of senior girls—the beautiful Miranda, the brainy Marion Quade, and the wealthy Irma

Leopold—ask permission from Mademoiselle to explore the base of the rock, she allows them to go. The unpopular Edith Wharton begs the girls to take her along, and the kindhearted Miranda obliges her. As the girls leap over a creek to get to the base of the rock, they spot another group of picnickers—the wealthy Colonel Fitzhubert and his wife Mrs. Fitzhubert, their nephew Michael, and their coachman Albert Crundall. Michael (or Mike, as he likes to be called) notices Miranda's beauty as he watches her jump the creek. At the base of the rock, Irma suggests they climb up to the first rise to take in the view. The girls follow Irma up and enjoy looking down at their schoolmates below. Edith says she isn't feeling well and asks if they can turn back, but the older girls, as if in a trance, take off their boots and continue barefoot up the rock. At the next rise, the girls all stop and rest again. Edith dozes off and wakes to find the seniors pressing on. She calls and begs for them to come back, but when they do not turn around, Edith becomes filled with terror and flees down the mountain.

That night, Mrs. Appleyard grows concerned as eight o'clock comes and goes. Finally, around 10, the drag pulls up. Mademoiselle says something awful has happened and promptly faints. While Minnie, one of the maids, hurries Mademoiselle upstairs, Mr. Hussey informs Mrs. Appleyard that Miss McCraw, Miranda, Irma, and Marion have disappeared. The narrator of the book reproduces a clipping from Mr. Hussey's report to the head of police, Constable Bumper, stating that after Edith came screaming down the rock, the group noticed that Miss McCraw was missing, too. A search ensued, but as dark fell, the group decided to head back. In the days after the picnic, Mrs. Appleyard attempts to keep news of what has happened from getting out. Bumper begins a search, enlisting the help of the Fitzhuberts, their coachman, several bloodhounds, and an Aboriginal Australian tracker—but the hunt turns up nothing. As the press seizes upon details of the disappearance, they begin showing up to the college and requesting statements from Mrs. Appleyard, who is busy trying to keep her traumatized students in line. Bumper brings Edith back to the rock, hoping a visit will jog her memory. Though Edith still isn't able to remember much of what happened up on the rock, she does recall that on her way down, she saw Miss McCraw, dressed in her underwear, headed up the other way. As Mrs. Appleyard fends off more and more members of the press, she realizes that the girls are not coming back—and that she must write letters to their wealthy, powerful parents informing them of what's transpired.

Meanwhile, Mike remains perturbed by the disappearances. Albert, with whom he's bonded over the last several days, tells him the girls are "bushed" by now—lost forever to the wilderness—but Mike is convinced that they are alive. Mike makes a plan to sneak away from Lake View, his aunt and uncle's estate, the next morning and conduct his own search. Albert agrees to go with him. At dawn, the men ride out to the

rock and head up the slopes. As night begins to fall, Albert suggests they head back, but Mike insists on staying the night. Albert returns to Lake View and lies to the worried Colonel about Mike's whereabouts. At first light, Mike continues to make his way up the rock. He becomes terribly sleepy after a short while. He falls asleep and wakes in pain—he realizes that his head is bleeding. He passes out again, thinking of Miranda. The concerned Albert rides out to the rock and ascends again. He finds Mike unconscious on the ground near two large boulders. Albert runs for help. Doctor McKenzie accompanies Albert back to the rock, where they retrieve Mike and bring him home to Lake View. The next morning, Albert finds himself wondering what happened to Mike while he was on the rock. He slips into Mike's room, retrieves his notebook, and finds a strange, incoherent note scrawled on one of the pages. Believing that the note is a clue, Albert alerts Colonel Fitzhubert, who calls a policeman, Jim Grant, and another physician, Doctor Cooling, and orders them to accompany Albert back to Hanging Rock. Though the doctor is dubious, Jim and Albert make their way up—and, near the boulders just ahead of where Mike was found, they discover an unconscious Irma Leopold. She is alive and unharmed. The men bring Irma back to Lake View, where the Fitzhuberts agree to shelter her while she recovers. Mike wakes up with no memory of what happened to him, so Albert pays a visit and explains everything. When Albert tells Mike that a girl was found alive, Mike asks which one—then becomes disappointed and withdrawn when he realizes that Irma, not Miranda, has made it home.

As the press sensationalizes the return of “MISSING HEIRESS” Irma Leopold, Mrs. Appleyard tries to keep the girls at the college calm—but as her frustration with the increasing public attention grows, she changes tack and begins disciplining them more seriously than ever before. She takes much of her ire out on the school's youngest boarder, the orphaned Sara Waybourne, pulling Sara out of art class as retribution for her guardian's late payment of tuition and ignoring Sara's sadness over Miranda's loss. Meanwhile, at Lake View, Mike and Irma have made full recoveries—though neither of them has any memories of the things they experienced on the rock. Mike and Irma strike up a friendship—one which Irma hopes will turn to romance—but as autumn approaches, Irma finds herself preparing to leave Lake View and rejoin her parents in Europe with no hint of resistance from Mike. Before leaving Australia, Irma pays one final visit to Appleyard College to gather her belongings and to bid goodbye to her fellow students. The visit is a disaster—when Irma steps into the girls' gymnasium class, they grow hysterical and turn on her in a hateful, almost possessed mob. Irma flees, leaving Mademoiselle and Miss Lumley deeply disturbed by what they've seen—and determined to keep it from Mrs. Appleyard. Minnie fusses over Sara, who has seemed pale, ill, and withdrawn since Irma's visit, refusing her meals and getting into frequent fights with the headmistresses. Miss Lumley summons her brother Reg to the

college, begging him to take her away and help her find a new job. Together they take a train into Melbourne—but the hotel they choose to stay in for the night burns down, killing them both.

Mike is preparing to leave Lake View for the winter and travel through the Australian outback, starting in the north of the country. He invites Albert to join him, and Albert agrees, urging Mike to write to him with his itinerary as soon as he's figured it out. As Albert drives Mike into town to make his train to Melbourne, an errand boy from a shop in town hands Albert a letter. Albert can't read cursive so asks Mike to read the letter aloud to him. It is from Irma's father, Mr. Leopold. The letter thanks Albert for his part in saving Irma's life, and the envelope contains a cheque for 1,000 pounds—more money than Albert has ever had in his life. After dropping Mike off at the station, Albert returns home and begins dreaming of traveling the countryside with his friend.

On the last Sunday before the Easter holiday, Mrs. Appleyard informs Minnie that Sara's guardian, Mr. Cosgrove, will be coming to collect her later that day. Mrs. Appleyard insists that Minnie, who usually answers the door, ignore the bell and let Mrs. Appleyard handle the interaction. Mrs. Appleyard looks pale and strange, but she offers Minnie a bonus on her wedding day—Minnie and Tom, the groom and stable boy, are soon getting married—and Minnie agrees. Later that afternoon, Mademoiselle, who has been concerned about Sara, visits the headmistress's office to talk to her about the girl—but a pale-looking Mrs. Appleyard informs her that Sara has left for the term. That evening, as Mademoiselle helps one of the maids clean out Sara and Miranda's now-empty room, she sees that Sara has left behind her most prized possession: a miniature portrait of Miranda. Knowing the girl would never willingly leave the picture behind, Mademoiselle writes a letter to Bumpher expressing her suspicions that something has gone terribly wrong. That night, while everyone else is asleep, Mrs. Appleyard rises from bed and goes into Sara's room, where she has a flashback of standing over the screaming girl. She hurries back to bed.

On Thursday, Mrs. Appleyard receives a letter from Sara's guardian stating that he is coming to collect her from school in three days' time. The next day, while planting flowers behind the school, Mr. Whitehead, the gardener, notices a terrible smell coming from a hydrangea bed. He examines the bush more closely and finds that several stems are crushed. As he cuts the ruined flowers away, he sees something in the hedge: it is the body of Sara Waybourne. Though her face is crushed in beyond recognition, the gardener knows from the petite frame just who it is. Mr. Whitehead informs Mrs. Appleyard of what he's found. She goes pale and orders him to ready a horse and buggy to take her to the police station in town. Once there, she orders him to drop her off and leave her. After Whitehead departs, Mrs. Appleyard pays a visit to Ben Hussey and asks

him to drive her out toward Hanging Rock, claiming to have gotten some bad news from friends who live out near the mount. Hussey drives her out to a remote house, where she asks him, just as she asked Whitehead, to drop her and leave her. Mrs. Appleyard walks the rest of the way to Hanging Rock, climbs to the summit, and has a vision of the dead Sara Waybourne. Terrified, Mrs. Appleyard flings herself off the mount, falling to her death on the rocks below. A clipping from a Melbourne newspaper dated February 14, 1913 reveals that Appleyard College burned to the ground in 1901, while the disappearances at Hanging Rock remain unsolved.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Appleyard – A mysterious English widow who is the founder and headmistress of Appleyard College. Very little is known about Mrs. Appleyard’s background and how she came to Australia—but her obsession with accruing wealth and social clout, her prim and strait-laced demeanor, and her often-calling treatment of her students suggest that she is straining toward upward mobility and potentially trying to escape from a dark past. Prior to the disappearance of three of her students and one of her employees, Mrs. Appleyard is preoccupied with instilling a regimented sense of order, grace, and compliance in both her pupils and her staff. In the wake of the disaster at **Hanging Rock**, Mrs. Appleyard seeks to even more carefully control the movements of those in her care—even as gossip, scandal, and instability threaten the very existence of Appleyard College. As months pass and no answer to the mystery of what happened and Hanging Rock presents itself, Mrs. Appleyard’s mental state deteriorates visibly. Desperate for control over her few remaining students, she develops a fixation with breaking the spirit of the unruly young orphan Sara Waybourne. Whether or not Mrs. Appleyard kills the girl with her own two hands, a matter on which the novel remains ambiguous, Mrs. Appleyard winds up responsible for the death of the school’s youngest and most vulnerable boarder. Having lost control entirely—and with only eight students due to return for the next term—Mrs. Appleyard travels to Hanging Rock, climbs to one of its peaks, and hurls herself off the edge, falling to her death. Mrs. Appleyard seems to blame her descent into madness on the rock itself, occasionally alluding to being able to sense the rock’s looming shadow spreading over everything in her life. Her unraveling and her death may represent, in Lindsay’s view, the predestined failure of colonial society’s oppressive organization, the decline of the Victorian era, or more generally the existential misery of living as a woman in a society centered on repression and gentility at the expense of all else.

Michael (Mike) Fitzhubert – A young Englishman visiting his wealthy aunt and uncle in Lake View for the summer. Michael

Fitzhubert finds himself swept up in the mysterious disappearances at **Hanging Rock**, having been picnicking at the grounds the very same day that the girls from Appleyard College. Michael—or Mike, as he’s referred to for much of the novel—witnesses Miranda, Marion, Irma, and Edith hopping over the creek and starting off on the trail up the rock. Captivated by Miranda’s beauty, he finds himself personally invested and deeply worried when he learns that the girls have gone missing. Mike undertakes his own search with the help of his coachman and confidant, Albert Crundall—a search that results in the recovery of Irma Leopold, in spite of some difficulties along the way. While Mike and Irma recover from their ordeals on Hanging Rock at Lake View, an easy friendship develops between the two—though Mike never stops yearning for Miranda, and appears to wish privately that she, not Irma, had been recovered from the rock. Michael is a gentleman, but he has the spirit of an adventurer—and his experiences on Hanging Rock change him, inspiring him not to languish within the trappings of wealth but to push himself out of his comfort zone and undertake an exploration of the Australian outback. Mike is sensitive, restless, and brave in spite of his occasional hard-headedness.

Albert Crundall – The Fitzhuberts’ coachman. A young man not much older than Michael Fitzhubert, Albert is crass yet funny, common yet gentle, and ruddy-faced yet handsome. He represents a stark contrast to the pampered inhabitants of Lake View and Appleyard College. Albert is a deeply practical man who is aware of his relatively low social station yet never wishes to change it. The novel implies that a terrible childhood in an orphanage—and a traumatic separation from his sister—have made Albert grateful just for the small pleasures of daily life, for the company of his beloved horses, and for the sense of possibility and adventure in the landscape all around him. Albert quickly befriends Mike Fitzhubert, finding himself impressed by the young man’s courage even as he scorns his foolhardiness. After Mike’s search for the missing Appleyard College girls up on **Hanging Rock** ends in disaster, Albert is the one to rescue both Mike and Irma Leopold in two separate acts of great bravery which bring him the respect of his superiors, the offer of a banking job from Irma’s father, and a cheque for 1,000 pounds to do with as he wishes. Albert is given the chance to change his life—and yet decides to put the money away, travel the outback with Mike, and continue to enjoy the simple pleasures of the fate he’s been dealt. Pragmatic, humorous, and loyal, Albert represents the hope for change from the ground up within Australian society.

Irma Leopold – A popular and wealthy senior girl at Appleyard College. Irma disappears mysteriously along with Marion Quade, Miranda, and Miss McCraw up on **Hanging Rock**—but unlike the others, she is found alive within a few days of having gone missing. Irma is an heiress whose father has ties to the mining industry, while her mother is rumored to be a member

of the well-known, wealthy Rothschild clan, who had the world's largest private fortune in the 19th century. Irma is richer than any of her classmates—a fact that brings her some pride—but is shown to be generous to a fault, even giving one of her expensive emerald bracelets to her favorite teacher, Mademoiselle. When Mike Fitzhubert, perturbed by the girls' disappearance and hoping to rescue Miranda (whose beauty he noticed on the day of the picnic) ascends Hanging Rock alone in search of the Appleyard girls, he finds Irma. However, Mike himself overpowered by the mysterious forces up on the rock before he is able to rescue her. Luckily, Albert Crundall (Mike's coachman) follows Mike up the rock and saves both of them from certain death. As Irma convalesces at Lake View, the Fitzhuberts' estate, her caretakers and investigators hope that she'll be able to provide some insight as to what happened up on the rock, but Irma has no memories beyond the picnic. Shyer and more demure in the wake of her accident, Irma harbors feelings for Mike—but does not act upon them when she senses he doesn't reciprocate her longing. After a disastrous final visit to Appleyard College to fetch her things—a visit in which her classmates turn on her, screaming in her face and threatening her as if possessed by pure rage—Irma joins her parents back home in Europe. The novel reveals that she eventually becomes a countess, though she never recovers her memories of her dreadful days on Hanging Rock.

Mademoiselle Dianne de Poitiers – The French and dancing teacher at Appleyard College. Without a doubt the most popular and beloved of all the teachers and governesses, Mademoiselle is gentle, kind, thoughtful, and most of all curious about her students and their inner lives. She has a genuine affection for all the girls and unique relationships with each of them. Mademoiselle inspires the envy and dislike of her colleagues Miss Lumley and Mrs. Appleyard, yet she refuses to let herself be roped into their petty plays for power. Toward the end of the novel, Mademoiselle—perturbed not only by the senior girls' disappearances but by the distressing emotional changes in the students left behind—begins to suspect that dark forces are at work at Appleyard College. Noticing Mrs. Appleyard's declining mental state and worried over Sara Waybourne's sudden, mysterious departure from the college (Mademoiselle is the only one to know Sara well enough to be disturbed by the prized possession she seems to have left behind) Mademoiselle writes to Constable Bumper to let him know that something is not right at the school. Mademoiselle leaves Appleyard to marry a watchmaker in town, severing her ties to the school for the sake of her own sanity—but the narrator of the book reveals that the events of the summer and autumn of 1900 change the woman forever.

Miranda – The most popular and beloved senior girl at Appleyard College and one of the school's shining examples of a fine pupil and proper young lady. A blonde and angelic beauty, Miranda is as kind as she is becoming. She shows special favor

to her roommate, the orphaned Sara Waybourne, and is even protective of the widely-loathed Edith Horton. Miranda has a special affinity for nature and is the only one of her classmates to express any real reverence for plants and animals. Miranda is a natural leader, and while Marion is the one to suggest the trek to the base of **Hanging Rock**, Miranda is the one to lead a small band of girls higher and higher up its peaks.

Marion Quade – A popular and highly intelligent senior girl at Appleyard College. Marion is smart and self-assured, and she is never far from her constant companions Irma and Miranda. She can occasionally be a bit of a know-it-all, but her friends take her endless thirst for knowledge in stride. Marion is, in a roundabout way, the one responsible for the trek up to **Hanging Rock**—an avid math student, she says she wants to take some “measurements” at the base of the rock, and secures permission from Mademoiselle to venture up to the trail at the bottom. From there, Marion and the others—propelled by curiosity, rebellion, or a more mysterious unseen force—find themselves climbing higher and higher up the rock until they disappear.

Miss Greta McCraw – The math teacher and a governess at Appleyard College. The thin, angular, astute, and logical Miss McCraw is well-enough liked by her students, though her eccentric, highly analytical nature is occasionally off-putting to the girls. Miss McCraw disappears during the picnic at **Hanging Rock**, having been last seen walking up the mount in only her underwear by the terrified Edith—who was herself at the time running down the mountain from a sinister but unseen force. Miss McCraw's body is never found, and the strange, perhaps supernatural forces which propelled her up the mountain are never revealed. All of the students and teachers at Appleyard seem in agreement that the thoughtful, careful Miss McCraw would never have abandoned her charges at the picnic grounds and headed up the dangerous mountain of her own volition—which makes her actions on the day of the picnic all the more disorienting and terrifying.

Edith Horton – The class dunce at Appleyard College. The portly, unpopular Edith receives vicious treatment from her classmates and is often the subject of their ire and ridicule. When Edith tags along on the senior girls' excursion up **Hanging Rock**, desperate to fit in with them, she gets more than she bargained for: after watching her classmates become seemingly hypnotized by an unseen force, Edith encounters a nasty red cloud circling overhead and, driven by terror, runs screaming down the mountain. Mrs. Appleyard, Constable Bumper, Doctor McKenzie and others hope that Edith will at least prove useful in the investigation of what happened to her fellow classmates—but Edith's memory is nearly a blank slate. She is unable to recall very little of what happened to her after the picnic—though she does provide a valuable clue when she suddenly remembers seeing Miss McCraw in only her underwear climbing up the mount.

Sara Waybourne – The youngest boarder at Appleyard College. Sara Waybourne is small for her age, but what she lacks in size, she makes up for in attitude. Dreamy and defiant, Sara is an orphan whose finances are overseen by a legal guardian, Mr. Jasper Cosgrove. Mr. Cosgrove is not a hands-on guardian, however, and he frequently leaves Sara in the care of Appleyard College during breaks and holidays—much to the dismay of Mrs. Appleyard, who finds the incorrigible Sara difficult and odious. The lonely Sara idolizes her roommate, Miranda, and is devastated when she disappears during the picnic at **Hanging Rock**. With Miranda gone, Sara struggles to fit in with her fellow students and to make nice with Mrs. Appleyard—she falls ill toward the end of the novel, taking to bed and refusing to eat, and is eventually discovered dead in a hydrangea bush behind the school with her face crushed beyond recognition. Sara’s death is a mystery, and whether she took her own life or was killed by Mrs. Appleyard is left deliberately ambiguous—another of the novel’s mysterious unknowns.

Mrs. Cutler – The gardener’s wife, who is a skilled nurse. She takes care of Irma after the girl is found alive on **Hanging Rock**—but because of Mrs. Cutler’s modesty, she fails to tell authorities that Irma was found without a corset on, which could have been an important clue in the mystery of what happened on the rock.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Miss Dora Lumley – A teacher and governess at Appleyard College. Miss Lumley is a stickler for rules (and a stick in the mud), and as such is unpopular among the girls. This means Miss Lumley is also quite often in conflict with the more popular Mademoiselle.

Rosamund – A kind and reserved student at Appleyard College.

Minnie – One of the members of the domestic staff at Appleyard College. A kind, gregarious, and slightly flighty young woman who is in a relationship with Tom, the school’s groom.

Mr. Edward Whitehead – The older, kindly gardener at Appleyard College. Toward the end of the novel, Mr. Whitehead is the first person to discover Sara Waybourne’s mutilated corpse in a hydrangea bush behind the main house.

Tom – The groom and stable boy at Appleyard College. He and Minnie are in love, and eventually decide to marry and leave their posts at the school for jobs at Lake View.

Mr. Ben Hussey – The owner of a local cab company. Mr. Hussey is the one to drive the Appleyard College girls out to **Hanging Rock** on the day of their fateful picnic—and, later in the novel, to bring Mrs. Appleyard herself there for her first (and last) visit.

Doctor McKenzie – A local doctor who attends to the girls at Appleyard College in the wake of the incident at **Hanging Rock**,

and later sees Mike Fitzhubert through his convalescence after Mike’s own disastrous journey there.

Constable Bumper – The head of local police. A thoughtful and curious man who takes his work seriously.

Jim Grant – A young policeman who assists Constable Bumper. When Bumper is unavailable one fateful morning, Jim is the one to help Albert rescue Mike after his ill-fated solo search at Hanging Rock.

Reg Lumley – Miss Lumley’s brother. A shabby but pompous man devoted to his sister.

Mr. Jasper Cosgrove – Sara Waybourne’s legal guardian.

Colonel Fitzhubert – Mike’s uncle. A bombastic and wealthy man who longs for his nephew to marry well.

Mrs. Fitzhubert – Colonel Fitzhubert’s wife and Mike’s aunt. A superficial woman who loves throwing garden parties and entertaining guests at her vast Lake View estate.

Doctor Cooling – A local doctor who helps to rescue Mike Fitzhubert after his accident at **Hanging Rock**.

Mr. Leopold – Irma’s father.

Mrs. Valange – The visiting art teacher at Appleyard College. She has a soft spot for Sara Waybourne, but is forced to leave her position after an argument with Mrs. Appleyard.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



NATURE, REPRESSION, AND COLONIALISM

The titular setting of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is also its central symbol, and the locus of one of its most important themes. **Hanging Rock** is a volcanic formation in Victoria, Australia which was, for tens of thousands of years, a sacred meeting-place for several Aboriginal tribes. It is enormous, remote, and—in spite of the picnic grounds and privies which have sprung up at its base to make tourists more comfortable—a place of wild, untamed terrain. When three schoolgirls and their governess go missing during an excursion to the rock, the local community—which has long viewed the rock as a serene place to gather, eat, read, and laze—must reckon with the rock itself, (and the larger Australian countryside around it) as an imposing, dangerous, and perhaps even vengeful presence. As the novel progresses, Lindsay shows how the forces of British colonialism have sought to repress, contain, and even obliterate nature. By linking

colonialism's cruelty toward Aboriginal Australian people and natural wonders to the forces of repression which colonial society enacts upon young, white females (like those who go missing at the rock), Lindsay argues that there is a powerful connection among the forces of nature, colonialism, and repression.

Throughout *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Joan Lindsay shows how three central forces—nature, repression, and colonialism—feed on and grow from one another, creating a vicious cycle of misery, violence, and fear. Nature in the world of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is a peculiar thing. Though the characters in the novel live in the midst of the untamed (and perhaps untamable) bush, they are all largely removed both physically and emotionally from any meaningful interaction with the natural world around them. The Appleyard College schoolgirls are, on Saint Valentine's Day of 1900, brought on a picnic to Hanging Rock but are discouraged from exploring or climbing the rock itself. They're repeatedly warned of how dangerous it is, yet they are told little of its history or sacred significance. The girls are permitted only on the picnic grounds—and even there, they're watched closely by their governesses. The girls' stilted, controlled relationship to the natural world represents underlying colonialist anxieties about the power of nature. Aware of the sacred, symbolic significance of landmarks like Hanging Rock, British settlers seek to tame and sanitize these places. The attempt to wrangle and control nature thus ties in with the force of repression—not just of the natural world, but of human nature, history, and sexuality.

Lindsay implies that repression is a byproduct of colonialism. The impulse to sanitize, tame, and control nature as a means of asserting a society's dominance over a certain region or native group, she suggests, also influences how that society treats its own. The schoolgirls at the center of the novel are controlled day and night by their strict headmistress, Mrs. Appleyard, and their many teachers and governesses. The girls must wear gloves, hats, and corsets even in miserable heat; they are strapped to posture-correcting boards as punishment for slumping; their meals, friendships, and conversations are monitored nonstop. All of this is done in the name of the girls' presentability, to be sure, but their strict minding is also perpetuated in the name of maintaining their safety. The ways in which the Appleyard girls are repressed, controlled, and cordoned off from the world around them is, of course, nowhere near comparable to the brutality, violence, and abject cruelty perpetrated against the Aboriginal Australians the society in which these girls live has displaced. Lindsay, however, uses the girls to suggest that colonialism is a brutal and hungry force which requires not just the oppression of those it supplants, but the repression of those it claims to benefit, in order to function.

Colonialism is the engine behind the forces of repression and control which, throughout the novel, oppress and minimize

both the natural world and the individuals who have populated it in the past and the present alike. While the Aboriginal Australian individuals who have been removed from their ancestral land to make room for the colonial society that has sprung up around Hanging Rock and Mount Macedon are never seen in the novel, Lindsay implies that the very techniques of obliteration and oppression meant to make their lands habitable and safe for the white settler population have, in fact, doomed the most vulnerable members of that new population. Whether the mystical properties found up on Hanging Rock—a sacred Aboriginal Australian site that has now become little more than a tourist attraction—is itself somehow responsible for the pattern of death, destruction, and loss which unfolds throughout the novel is unclear. What is clear, however, is that Lindsay, in making the rock the novel's central setting and symbol, is suggesting that the forces of colonialism are not absolute in power. Whether by some mystic force of retribution enacted by nature itself, by the rebellion of a colonialist society's repressed and frustrated members, or simply by the inherent failures of a system predicated on such desperation for total control, Lindsay argues that just as the tragedy of Hanging Rock comes to loom over those who live around it like a shadow, so too will the unignorable atrocities of colonialism soon come to obscure everything in their path.

By drawing attention to the ways in which the forces of nature, repression, and colonialism intersect and interact, Lindsay ultimately suggests that any society built on the erasure and subjugation of the peoples, histories, and places that preceded it will fail, falling victim to its own rhetorical and ideological traps. The eerie exodus of schoolgirls up onto the peaks of Hanging Rock—and their subsequent disappearance—serves as a complex metaphor for the irresistible pull of nature, the impossibility of repressing curiosity and sexuality, and the unstable foundation created by colonialist methods of world-building.



MYSTERY AND THE UNKNOWN

Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is a novel about a bizarre fictional mystery. The mystery at the heart of the book—the disappearance of three schoolgirls and one of their governesses during a picnic at **Hanging Rock** in Victoria, Australia—is famously left unresolved, and as the tragic event's reverberations make their way through the rural community surrounding the rock, the characters in the novel must wrestle with the fact that what has happened has no discernable cause or solution. As more and more characters find themselves grappling with the unknown—and, in some cases, descending into the world of the surreal and the bizarre as they do—Joan Lindsay employs thematic, symbolic, and metafictional techniques to argue that the human impulse to know the unknowable and solve the unsolvable is a destructive and futile one.

As the novel unfolds and its existential questions deepen, Joan Lindsay uses the dark, mysterious “pattern” that begins unfolding after the disappearances at Hanging Rock to show how her characters and their lives become consumed by the desire for closure and certainty—even when none can be had. From the outset of the novel’s core mystery—the strange disappearances at Hanging Rock—Lindsay establishes that there are no easy answers to what has happened. As she switches among several characters’ perspectives, she suggests that the mystery is strange and supernatural in origin. Several characters’ watches stop at the base of the rock, while Miranda, Marion, and Irma, the three senior girls who lead the trek up the mount, seem hypnotized by unseen forces into climbing higher and higher. The girls’ unwitting companion Edith Horton observes a dark red cloud which drives her to hysteria and sends her running down the mountain—on her way, she encounters the school’s math governess, the logical and strait-laced Miss McCraw, stripped to her skivvies and ascending the ancient formation. Several bizarre forces seem to be at work in the early chapters which depict, in great detail, the events that transpire at Hanging Rock. As Lindsay creates a mystery of epic proportions, the answer to what has happened to the senior girls and Miss McCraw makes itself impossible to imagine. With so many forces at work—temporal, psychological, and seemingly supernatural—Lindsay intentionally demonstrates that whatever has happened on Hanging Rock, it defies explanation.

As the novel unfolds, the characters both at the center and on the fringes of the action seek desperately to understand and solve the mystery of what happened at Hanging Rock. Search parties scour the area, local detectives and investigators from the city question key witnesses, and newspaper reporters seize upon any detail they can as they speculate about kidnappings and murders. Michael Fitzhubert, a young Englishman who witnessed the girls ascend the mountain, enlists his family’s coachman Albert to aid him in his own independent search of the area. The characters in the novel are desperate to understand what has happened—perhaps because a part of them senses that admitting there is no explanation would be even worse than uncovering the most heinous of crimes. As the characters become frantic for an answer to what has befallen the missing and try to uncover the truth—or come up with their own versions of what happened—their searching and speculation leads, over and over, to dead ends. Edith Horton, the sole witness to what happened on the mountain, seems to have had her memory wiped due to fear or trauma. Irma Leopold, one of the missing girls, is found—but doesn’t remember anything of her experience beyond the picnic, either. Searches of the mountain’s crags, crannies, and caves turn up nothing—save for a single piece of calico fabric discovered by amateur hunters which seems to taunt the work of investigators, trackers, and bloodhounds.

Lindsay’s novel ends with a “clipping” from an Australian newspaper dated to 1913. The clipping commemorates the anniversary of the disappearances and states that their cause is not presently—and likely never will be—known to the public. This ending is not the original way Lindsay hoped to close her novel. She did, in fact, write a final chapter which explained what happened on the fateful afternoon at Hanging Rock—a chapter which plainly states that some kind of time warp or wormhole opened on top of the rock to transform and consume Miss McCraw, Miranda, and Marion. The chapter was, however, excised by Lindsay’s editor and replaced with the chapter which now closes the novel on a note of mystery. This fact elevates the theme of the mysterious and the unknown into the realm of the metafictional. Just as Lindsay wanted her characters to resign themselves to the fact that the mystery would never be solved, so too did Lindsay’s own editor want the book’s readers to resign themselves to that idea. The decision to end the novel on an ambiguous note, arrived at jointly by Lindsay and her editor, seems calculated to hammer home the idea that some mysteries are beyond explanation—and that sometimes, the search for the truth is futile.

The theme of mystery and the unknown in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has reverberations both serious and tongue-in-cheek. Lindsay holds the key to the mystery in her own mind but does not share it with her readers—just as Hanging Rock holds the answer to what befell the three missing Appleyard women, but refuses to relinquish their bodies or their stories even to those desperately searching for them.



WEALTH AND CLASS

The society depicted in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is one still in its nascent stages. The settlers and colonizers who populate the township of Mount Macedon in 1900 are poor farmers, wealthy English transplants, girls on the cusp of enormous inheritances, and destitute orphans. The socioeconomic striations within this fledgling society are profound. As the novel’s characters seek to cement or change their places in society, Lindsay suggests that even in a place as full of possibility as turn-of-the-century Australia, people will always use wealth to insulate themselves from others, advance their own interests, and control those around them.

Throughout the novel, Joan Lindsay shows how the society being birthed in the heart of the Victoria countryside is built to replicate the stringently-divided society of England. At Appleyard College, a boarding school run by the mysterious widow Mrs. Appleyard, the trappings of wealth and class inform the relationships between and amongst staff and students, fueling anxieties, resentments, and vendettas—often to devastating effect. The most class-conscious individual at Appleyard—and perhaps in the entire novel—is the founder and headmistress of the school, Mrs. Appleyard. Having purchased

a gaudy mansion in which to house the school several years ago, Mrs. Appleyard has wasted no time filling the halls with students from wealthy homes. Mrs. Appleyard's social position back in England is never divulged, but as a widow, it is clear that the wily headmistress is desperate to support herself in an unforgiving, patriarchal world. Mrs. Appleyard is obsessed with appearances—she keeps her hair in a meticulously-pinned bouffant and never forgoes wearing a corset. She favors wealthy students such as Irma Leopold and Miranda but despises the less fortunate, such as the orphaned Sara Waybourne. She is constantly checking her ledger, obsessing over outstanding tuition debts, and sending letters in attempts to collect funds from parents and guardians.

When tragedy strikes and three students and one governess go missing on an excursion to **Hanging Rock**, Mrs. Appleyard is not concerned with the missing individuals' well-being or safe return—instead, she sets to work right away on defusing the gossip she knows the incident will inspire, desperate to save her school's reputation (and thus her own livelihood.) As word gets out about the disappearance, Mrs. Appleyard's state of mind and physical wellbeing visibly begin to deteriorate—but again, her tortured demeanor has little to do with her anxiety over her missing colleague and charges but instead with her fear of losing the monetary assets and societal protections that heading the school represents. Mrs. Appleyard—even from a seemingly disadvantaged position as a widow and a single woman alone in a brand-new country—seeks to emulate the patterns of wealth, class, and favoritism that define the society from which she comes. Rather than create a new environment for her girls free of prejudice or preferential treatment based on money and social standing, Mrs. Appleyard perpetuates these systems of judgement in order to buffet her own societal position (and line her own pockets).

At the Lake View estate of the wealthy Fitzhubert family, the deep and often unmovable striations of money and class also dictate the behaviors and relationships of its inhabitants. The Fitzhuberts—the Colonel and his wife—are English nobility who have picked up and moved to Australia. Their visiting nephew, Michael Fitzhubert, is a pampered Cambridge boy. Though the sensitive Michael (Mike) befriends the family's coachman, Albert Crundall, and enlists the man's help in searching for the lost Appleyard girls, the Fitzhuberts seem to have little interest in their community, their servants, or anyone outside of their social class. They host garden parties even in the midst of tragedy in their community, more focused on their prize roses than the four missing women who may have been abducted or killed. Even when Irma Leopold is recovered by Albert and Michael and brought to convalesce at Lake View, the Fitzhuberts remain focused solely on wealth and class: they know that Irma is a wealthy heiress who will soon come into half a million dollars, and so begin encouraging Mike to court and marry her. They eye Irma's jewels almost enviously in spite

of the vast wealth they've already accrued, paying no mind to who Irma is as a person as they steamroll every conversation with her in an attempt to make themselves look good. The Fitzhuberts' focus on maintaining their societal position—and even advancing it—demonstrates the investment of the wealthy in keeping up with the status quo. The Fitzhuberts ignore the freedom Australia might represent and instead seek to perpetuate old systems of wealth and class—even when those systems make even them feel like hamsters on a wheel.

Albert, on the other hand, is happy with his position and simple life and is unconcerned with social advancement. The friendship he develops with Mike is born out of mutual appreciation—not out of any desire to play some social-climbing game. Lindsay rewards Albert's outlook by having him, toward the end of the novel, receive a large sum of money and a job offer at a bank for his part in saving Irma Leopold. Mr. Leopold, Irma's father and a wealthy banker, offers Albert the chance to change his life—but instead, Albert decides to put the money away and explore the Australian countryside with Mike. Albert represents a new model of existing within a deeply-stratified society in which wealth and class dictate so much—he is perhaps Lindsay's way of expressing the wishful thought that the deep divisions in society might someday, in the hands of the right people, begin to heal and change.

Ultimately, Lindsay suggests that with few exceptions, societies—even new ones with seemingly limitless potential—will forever structure themselves around the striations of wealth and class that have defined cultures and countries around the globe for centuries. Wealth and class are, in Lindsay's view, a kind of weaponry which disadvantage or even obliterate society's most vulnerable members.



GOSSIP AND SCANDAL

Picnic at Hanging Rock is a fictional book written in the form of a true crime document. For years after its publication, readers sought to uncover any trace of news articles or historical documents about the purportedly real disappearance at **Hanging Rock**—to no avail. Just as Joan Lindsay created shock, titillation, and rabid interest in her readership, the characters within her novel spread gossip, rumors, and scandal. By creating a book which in itself serves as a metafictional commentary on the toxic environment of sensationalism created therein, Joan Lindsay uses *Picnic at Hanging Rock* to show how gossip and scandal have the power to influence and impact the lives and fortunes of those within it—from the wealthy and powerful to the obscure and downtrodden.

From the early pages of the novel, Lindsay takes every opportunity to show how the potential for scandal and gossip control the daily lives of her characters. The girls of Appleyard College are perhaps the characters most intimately connected

with the theme of gossip and scandal. Even before their fateful journey to Hanging Rock, the teenage boarders find their lives controlled by the potential of their every action to reflect poorly upon their school and to render them social pariahs. As Mrs. Appleyard sends the girls off on their journey to Hanging Rock in a covered drag, she reminds them not to remove their gloves until they're past Woodend, the nearest town. She also instructs them never to remove their hats no matter how stifling the heat on the journey or at the rock. This simple example shows just how little fuel society would need to turn the girls into objects of gossip and scandal—the girls are told to stay completely covered because failing to do so would mean appearing lewd or improper according to social norms. Mrs. Appleyard, to be fair, is overly obsessed with appearances—but as she bids the girls goodbye, even she knows that the collective future of the school and the individual futures of the girls hinge on how they present themselves to others.

Once news of the disappearances at Hanging Rock breaks, the girls find their lives transformed by the rumor mill in their small, rural township. As Appleyard College becomes the focus of gossip, scandal, and mystery, concerned neighbors, local and city policemen, members of the press, and intrigued townspeople alike knock at the door day and night. The girls' schedules are disturbed, their learning environment becomes the subject of scrutiny, and their very educations are threatened. As speculation about the nature of the disappearances gets more and more out of hand, concerned parents write to Mrs. Appleyard asking to pull their children from the school. The girls' own questions about what has happened to their classmates and math teacher begins to drive them all slowly mad—as evidenced by their traumatized collective reaction when Irma comes back to school to visit, gather her things, and say goodbye. The girls' entire environment has been destabilized by the far-reaching effects of gossip, scandal, speculation, and uncertainty—and all of their lives, forever changed the day of the picnic, are further thrown into tumult by the maelstrom of stories swirling around them.

Joan Lindsay's clever use of the true crime genre to tell a fictional tale serves as a metafictional commentary on the glitter and allure of scandal, gossip, and drama. From the time of its publication, Lindsay's novel was marketed as—and believed by many to be—a true crime book. Readers hunted tirelessly for more information about the purportedly truthful disappearances, driven by the unsolvable mystery's gravity and unknowability. Joan Lindsay herself constructed the very foundation of her novel around human nature's insatiable need for scandal and gossip, knowing that the same uproar which, in the pages of the novel, spawns countless news articles and endless verbal speculation about the nature of the disappearances would propel her actual novel into the hands (and minds) of curious readers.

By creating a story about the destabilizing effects of gossip and

scandal which itself, as a book, has long relied on the human desire for those very things, Joan Lindsay has created a perfect example of how sensationalized media and dramatized rumors can make or break one's fortune. Just as the Hanging Rock scandal had the potential to bring Appleyard College to its knees, Lindsay created a book which had the potential to shape her life, career, and legacy—and she pulled both plots off with aplomb.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



HANGING ROCK

The central symbol within Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is the titular Hanging Rock, which represents many things to many different characters: it is a symbol of colonialism's evils; of nature's retributive properties; and of the power of the mystic, unseen, and unknown.

Hanging Rock is an ancient and distinctive volcanic formation which was, for tens of thousands of years before white settlers arrived in Australia, a sacred site and hallowed meeting-place for several local Aboriginal Australian tribes. Much like Mount Rushmore in the U.S. (originally known as the Six Grandfathers by the Lakota Sioux), Hanging Rock has been desecrated and transformed by colonialism into a tourist attraction and picnic ground. When a group of schoolgirls from Appleyard College venture to the rock for a picnic one afternoon, a small group of girls who go up on the rock to explore get much more than they bargained for. Though Edith Horton runs down the rock, hysterical after having witnessed a sinister red cloud above her, three of her classmates—Miranda, Marion Quade, Irma Leopold, and their arithmetic teacher, Miss McCraw—go missing on the rock. Irma is eventually found, but the others remain lost. In this sense, the mystical rock is a manifestation of the vast dangers of the Australian outback and a reminder of how British colonialists (the Appleyard girls among them) have brutalized and attempted to sanitize nature in the name of taming danger.

The looming presence of Hanging Rock continues to haunt several of the characters throughout the novel—most notably Mrs. Appleyard, the owner and headmistress of the school who is so tortured by the disappearances that she eventually commits suicide by flinging herself off the rock. In this way, Hanging Rock comes to represent a challenge to some and a warning to others, and as the dark “pattern” of death and destruction which begins on its peaks spreads throughout the small rural community surrounding it, an unmissable emblem of the ways in which colonialism's dark specter threatens all in its path.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* published in 1967.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Whether the Headmistress of Appleyard College [...] had any previous experience in the educational field, was never divulged. It was unnecessary. With her high-piled greying pompadour and ample bosom, as rigidly controlled and disciplined as her private ambitions, the cameo portrait of her late husband flat on her respectable chest, the stately stranger looked precisely what the parents expected of an English Headmistress. And as looking the part is well known to be more than half the battle...

Related Characters: Mrs. Appleyard

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening pages of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Joan Lindsay introduces the novel's central character (and biggest enigma,) Mrs. Appleyard. The strict headmistress of Appleyard College—an academic institution for young ladies located in the rural Victoria countryside—is a buttoned-up and closed-mouthed widow whose mysterious past remains unclear to everyone around her. This passage suggests that Mrs. Appleyard actively *wants* to remain unknowable to her colleagues and students—she knows that as long as she “look[s] the part,” no one will poke into her past or disturb her for details about her life and qualifications. Mrs. Appleyard’s obsession with control—over her appearance, over the way she’s perceived, over the way her college is run, and over the behavior of the students she houses within it—will serve as one of the novel’s major threads. Mrs. Appleyard’s obsession ties in intimately with all the book’s major themes. Her impulses to feed the atmosphere of repression throughout colonial Australia, to keep her students closed up and away from nature, to stifle any gossip about her or her college, and to ascend the social ladder by currying favor from her boarders’ wealthy parents will all have grave consequences in the weeks to come.

“I have instructed Mademoiselle that as the day is likely to be warm, you may remove your gloves after the drag has passed through Woodend. You will partake of luncheon at the Picnic Grounds near the Rock. Once again let me remind you that the Rock itself is extremely dangerous and you are therefore forbidden to engage in any tomboy foolishness in the matter of exploration, even on the lower slopes. [...] I think that is all. Have a pleasant day and try to behave yourselves in a manner to bring credit to the College.”

Related Characters: Mrs. Appleyard (speaker), Mademoiselle Dianne de Poitiers

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Mrs. Appleyard prepares to send her boarders off for an afternoon picnic at Hanging Rock—a nearby volcanic formation which has become a tourist attraction—she instructs them as to how they should conduct themselves while away from the school grounds for the afternoon. She hopes to control not just their behavior but their appearances as well, reminding them that they are not to remove their gloves until they have passed through the last town in the area and entered the wilderness. Even out in the bush, however, the girls are not permitted to relax physically or behaviorally and be themselves. The girls must keep their hats on their head and watch their actions at all times, even away from the eyes of neighbors and acquaintances.

In hopes of scaring the girls into following orders, Mrs. Appleyard attempts to impart upon the girls just how dangerous nature is in order to discourage them from exploring, wandering, or acting unladylike by engaging in “tomboy foolishness.” Her desire to control not only the girls themselves but the potential for any gossip or scandal shows just how rigidly Mrs. Appleyard longs to regulate everything around her—seemingly out of fear that any poor reflection upon her could have devastating consequences. This fear seems to speak to the idea that Mrs. Appleyard is indeed hiding something about her past or her true self—something that would tear apart her carefully constructed façade.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Insulated from natural contacts with earth, air and sunlight, by corsets pressing on the solar plexus, by voluminous petticoats, cotton stockings and kid boots, the drowsy well-fed girls lounging in the shade were no more a part of their environment than figures in a photograph album, arbitrarily posed against a backcloth of cork rocks and cardboard trees.

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

This lyrical and descriptive passage offers a glimpse of the Appleyard College girls' picnic at Hanging Rock. Even out in the bush, enjoying an afternoon at the base of one of Victoria's most immense and impressive natural wonders, the girls are "insulated" from the nature all around them. The trappings of their outfits press against their bodies, constant reminders of the ways in which the girls are expected to essentially ignore their surroundings and focus on behaving like proper ladies. The girls are not even close to being a "part of their environment"—the repressive forces of the social graces necessitated by their colonial society have isolated them entirely from nature. As the major theme of the novel concerns the connection between nature, repression, and colonialism, Joan Lindsay seems to be suggesting that such a disconnection from nature is detrimental to the mind, soul, and indeed the body—she is arguing that the ways in which colonialism dictates mannered repression and withdrawal from nature causes pain, isolation, and indeed calamity.

☞ If Albert was right and they were only schoolgirls about the same age as his sisters in England, how was it they were allowed to set out alone, at the end of a summer afternoon? He reminded himself that he was in Australia now: Australia, where anything might happen. In England everything had been done before: quite often by one's own ancestors, over and over again. He sat down on a fallen log, heard Albert calling him through the trees, and knew that this was the country where he, Michael Fitzhubert, was going to live.

Related Characters: Edith Horton, Irma Leopold, Marion Quade, Miranda, Michael (Mike) Fitzhubert

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23-24

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Michael Fitzhubert—a young Englishman visiting his wealthy aunt and uncle at their summer home in Mount Macedon—watches the four Appleyard College girls leap over the creek near where he and his family are picnicking in order to ascend Hanging Rock. Michael is surprised that the girls have been allowed to wander off on their own. This shows that Michael, a member of the same wealthy, mannered social class as the girls before him, is intimately aware of the repressive society rules enforced both in his home of England and in Australia. Mike, however, is new to this strange country—and as he ruminates on the infinite possibilities of Australian societies, he wonders if there might be a glimmer of hope that things could be different here. Mike is excited by this idea—he longs to push back against the restrictive nature of his own upbringing, and sees the girls in this scene as an emblem of the freedoms that might be possible in Australia.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ "I feel perfectly awful! When are we going home?" Miranda was looking at her so strangely, almost as if she wasn't seeing her. When Edith repeated the question more loudly, she simply turned her back and began walking away up the rise, the other two following a little way behind. Well, hardly walking—sliding over the stones on their bare feet as if they were on a drawing-room carpet... [...] "Come back, all of you! Don't go up there—come back!" She felt herself choking and tore at her frilled lace collar. [...] To her horror all three girls were fast moving out of sight behind the monolith.

Related Characters: Edith Horton (speaker), Irma Leopold, Marion Quade, Miranda

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

As four girls from Appleyard College—Miranda, Marion, Irma, and the ungainly Edith, who has tagged along with them—climb higher and higher up Hanging Rock, the rock itself seems to exert strange, supernatural forces upon the

girls. They become tired and dizzy and frequently stop to rest and nap; once terrified of nature, they allow insects and amphibians to crawl all over them as they doze.

In this passage, Edith awakes from a nap to find that her schoolmates are headed trancelike up the mountain. She tries to stop them, but they seem almost possessed as they “glide” forward away from her, immune to her strangled cries. The rock—or whatever force might control it—seems to be actively trying to stop Edith from calling out to the girls and rousing them from their trance, constricting her windpipe so that her voice is a mere rasp. This passage highlights the elements of the mysterious and the unknown that will continue to drive the mystery at the heart of the novel, while also suggesting that the girls—given a taste of nature and unable to repress their hunger for emotional and physical freedom anymore—are breaking free of the restrictive bonds which have severed them from the incredible world around them.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☛☛ The Headmistress, after a night passed in staring at the wall of her bedroom interminably whitening to the new day, was on deck at her usual hour with not a hair of the pompadour out of place. Her first concern this morning was to ensure that nothing of yesterday’s happenings should be so much as whispered beyond the College walls.

Related Characters: Mrs. Appleyard (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which unfolds in the early morning hours just after Mrs. Appleyard receives the news about the disappearances of three schoolgirls and one governess at Hanging Rock, demonstrates the drive to control the narrative around the mystery which will motivate Mrs. Appleyard for the rest of the novel. Mrs. Appleyard is haunted by the news of what’s happened—but her immediate concern, as this passage shows, is not necessarily for the wellbeing of her colleague or the charges who have been lost. Mrs. Appleyard, rather, is “first[ly] concern[ed]” with how to control those still at the college and ensure they don’t spread the word to the press and the community beyond. Mrs. Appleyard is terrified of any blight or blemish

that might tarnish her own name or that of the college—and, as the novel continues, will resort to increasingly desperate and even inhumane tactics as she makes several futile attempts to keep the “College Mystery” under wraps.

☛☛ For three consecutive mornings the Australian public had been devouring, along with its bacon and eggs, the luscious details of the College Mystery as it was now known to the Press. Although no further information had been unearthed and nothing resembling a clue, [...] the public must be fed. To this end, some additional spice had been added to Wednesday’s columns’ photographs of the Hon. Michael’s ancestral home, Haddingham Hall [...] and of course Irma Leopold’s beauty and reputed millions on coming of age.

Related Characters: Irma Leopold, Michael (Mike) Fitzhubert

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

This passage demonstrates Joan Lindsay’s disdain for both the unstoppable mechanism that is the dreaded “Press” and the insatiable mob that is the ravenous public. One of the major themes in the novel is that of scandal and gossip—as the “College Mystery” generates intrigue, mystery, and horror throughout the small rural community that has sprung up around Mount Macedon and the surrounding areas, it becomes irresistible fodder for the upper and working classes alike. Mrs. Appleyard’s disdain for this machine mirrors Lindsay’s—but Mrs. Appleyard’s particular hatred of the press is entwined with her desire to control the narrative around the disappearances and repress public interest in the situation. Even as the narrative surrounding the “College Mystery” begins to encompass the undeniably fascinating issues of wealth and status as well as mystery and tragedy, Mrs. Appleyard believes she can exert influence over how her college—and by extension herself—are seen and understood.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☛☛ “All my life I’ve been doing things because other people said they were the right things to do. This time I’m going to do something because *I* say so—even if you and everyone else thinks I’m mad.”

Related Characters: Michael (Mike) Fitzhubert (speaker), Albert Crundall

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Michael Fitzhubert attempts to cajole his friend (and his family's hired coachman) Albert Crundall into joining him on an independent search of Hanging Rock. This passage reveals Michael's intimate connection to several of the novel's major themes. Michael, who has had an upper-class upbringing in England, speaks in this passage of the feelings of repression and confinement he's struggled with all his life. Though Michael's upbringing is a picnic compared to Albert's rough coming-of-age in a dilapidated orphanage, Mike (as he prefers to be called) does struggle with very real feelings of being minimized, controlled, and influenced by other people. Now, Mike—believing the efforts to find and rescue the girls who have gone missing on Hanging Rock are insufficient—wants to break out against that repression and venture on his own into nature, just as the missing girls themselves did on the fateful day of their picnic.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ The road wound its charming leisurely way between sleeping gardens still heavy with dew and shadowed by the upper mountain slopes. Swathes of virgin forest ran right down to an immaculate tennis lawn, an orchard, a row of raspberry canes. [...] Mike was enchanted by this strangely favoured country where palms, delphiniums and raspberry canes grew side by side.

Related Characters: Michael (Mike) Fitzhubert

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 72-73

Explanation and Analysis

As Mike and Albert set off on their clandestine journey to Hanging Rock to undertake their own search for the missing Appleyard College girls, they pass, at dawn, through the just-waking neighborhood surrounding Mike's aunt and uncle's summer estate. Mike notices as he rides on that the

"immaculate" neighborhood, dotted by tennis lawns and carefully pruned orchards, brushes up against the tangling "virgin forest" of the Australian bush. This passage speaks to the ways in which repression and colonialism attempt to wrangle nature to fit their pristine standards—and the ways in which those forces often fail to properly obscure or eliminate nature. The wealthy neighborhood in which Mike's aunt and uncle make their home has sprung up in the middle of nowhere, and though the members of the wealthy elite have employed people to manicure their lawns and create facsimiles of "nature" for them, they've been unable to eradicate reminders of the wild land on which they live.

☝☝ He laid his head on a stone and fell instantly into the thin ragged sleep of exhaustion, waking with a sudden stab of pain over one eye. A trickle of blood was oozing on to the pillow. The pillow was as hard and sharp as a stone under his burning head. [...] At first he thought it was the sound of birds in the oak tree outside his window. [...] It seemed to be coming from all round him—a low wordless murmur, almost like the murmur of distant voices, with now and then a sort of trilling that might have been little spurts of laughter.

Related Characters: Michael (Mike) Fitzhubert

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mike falls asleep while journeying up the rock in search of the missing Appleyard College girls. Just as the girls felt sleepy and unable to resist napping on their own ascent, Mike falls suddenly into a deep, disorienting sleep. When he comes to, there is a deep gash on his head which trickles blood—evidence, seemingly, that while Mike has been perceiving himself to be "asleep," he has either been attacked or has injured himself while falling prey to powerful forces beyond his control. This dark, disorienting passage adds to the air of mystery concerning what forces Hanging Rock exerts upon those who attempt to climb it—and why. Mike's journey echoes the girls' own climb, suggesting that while they seemed to be gliding carefree up the mountain, the schoolgirls were likely under the influence of a powerful, unseen force.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Greatly to Mrs. Cutler's surprise the lamb had been brought in just as she had been lying on the Rock, without a corset. A modest woman, for whom the word corset was never uttered by a lady in the presence of a gent, she had made no comment to the doctor [...] Thus the valuable clue of the missing corset was never followed up nor communicated to the police. Nor to the inmates of Appleyard College where Irma Leopold, well known for her fastidious taste [...] had been seen by several of her classmates, on the morning of [the picnic] wearing a pair of long, lightly boned, French satin stays.

Related Characters: Irma Leopold, Mrs. Cutler

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 95-96

Explanation and Analysis

When Irma Leopold is found alive on Hanging Rock, Albert Crundall and a local doctor and policeman rush her back to Lake View to recover. There, she's put into the care of Mrs. Cutler, the gardener's wife, who is also an able nurse. However, when Irma arrives, Mrs. Cutler is so "modest"—or repressed—that she doesn't mention the fact that Irma isn't wearing a corset. This fact, the narrator reveals, might have led to a break in the case, given that Irma was widely known for being "fastidious" and always outfitted in fine corsets beneath her dresses and skirts. This passage is significant thematically because it shows how repression—meant to keep a standard of behavior, appearance, and living at the forefront of the collective imagination at all times—actually hampers and threatens the most basic of human dignities. Wanting to avoid being the subject of gossip and scandal, the repressed Mrs. Cutler withholds major information which might have given some insight into the nature of what happened up on the rock.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Sara had just reached the door when she was called back. "I omitted to mention that if I have not heard from your guardian by Easter I shall be obliged to make other arrangements for your education."

For the first time a change of expression flickered behind the great eyes. "What arrangements?"

"That will have to be decided. There are Institutions."

"Oh, no. No. Not that. Not again."

"One must learn to face up to facts, Sara. After all, you are thirteen years old. You may go."

Related Characters: Sara Waybourne, Mrs. Appleyard (speaker), Mr. Jasper Cosgrove

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mrs. Appleyard calls Sara to her office. Sara has, since the start of the novel, been Mrs. Appleyard's most-hated student—but in the wake of the disappearances at Hanging Rock, as Mrs. Appleyard's need to regain control of her college and her environment grows, she's become steadily more cruel to Sara with each passing day. Sara, an orphan, is the school's youngest boarder. Her guardian, Mr. Cosgrove, is often remote and out-of-touch, though kind enough to Sara on his visits. Here, Mrs. Appleyard lets Sara know that if she does not find a way to pay her outstanding fees by Easter, she'll be sent to another "institution" to be educated. Sara—who, the novel later reveals, suffered a traumatic upbringing in an orphanage—is terrified of being cast out. Mrs. Appleyard, desperate to control something (or someone), has put Sara in an impossible position. She is attempting to impress upon Sara the need to "face up to facts" and begin complying with the atmosphere of control and repression at Appleyard College—even as she demands Sara somehow influence an outcome that is firmly beyond her control.

Chapter 10 Quotes

The girl so far had remembered nothing of her experiences on the Rock; nor, in Doctor McKenzie's opinion or that of the two eminent specialists from Sydney and Melbourne, would she ever remember. A portion of the delicate mechanism of the brain appeared to be irrevocably damaged. "Like a clock, you know," the doctor explained. "A clock that stops under a certain set of unusual conditions and refuses ever to go again beyond a particular point."

Related Characters: Doctor McKenzie (speaker), Irma Leopold

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 113-114

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lindsay explores the psychological damage

Irma experiences in the wake of her ordeal at Hanging Rock. Irma was discovered physically unharmed—but since recovering from the shocked and exhausted state in which she came home, she’s been unable to recall any details of her time up on the rock. Doctor McKenzie speculates that Irma’s mind is somehow insulating her from what she’s experienced by stopping “like a clock.” Doctor McKenzie couldn’t possibly know that on that fateful afternoon at Hanging Rock, all watches stopped as soon as the group crossed onto the picnic grounds—but the eerie connection between the stopped watches and Irma’s “stopped” brain suggests that there is a supernatural element to the mystery of what befell the girls at Hanging Rock.

This passage also delivers another glimpse at a different angle of “repression,” one of the novel’s major themes. Behavior and appearances are not the only things that need to be repressed to survive in colonial society—it turns out that there are traumas resulting from society’s strict moral and social codes that necessitate their own repression and excision from consciousness.

Chapter 12 Quotes

“If I may say so, now that you are no longer under my care, your teachers were continually complaining to me of your lack of application. Even a girl with your expectations should be able to spell.” The words were hardly out of her mouth before she realized that she had made a strategic blunder. It was above all things necessary not to further antagonize the wealthy Leopolds. Money is power. Money is strength and safety. Even silence has to be paid for.

Related Characters: Mrs. Appleyard (speaker), Irma Leopold

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 137-138

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Irma Leopold has come to Appleyard College to collect her belongings and bid her former classmates goodbye before sailing back to Europe with her parents. During the visit, Mrs. Appleyard quickly pulls Irma into her study, hoping to use the opportunity to meet to get back into Irma’s good graces (and thus those of Irma’s wealthy, influential family). Mrs. Appleyard, however, becomes incensed when Irma refuses to play nice—she winds up insulting the girl, metaphorically shooting her own efforts to control and dominate Irma in the foot. Mrs.

Appleyard immediately recognizes the gravity of her error. Every move the headmistress has made in her life, this passage suggests, has been “strategic”—her whole existence, it now seems, is calculated to secure the power and protection of the wealthy and the well-bred. This shows what a hypocrite Mrs. Appleyard really is, and foreshadows her descent into outright evil—Mrs. Appleyard seeks to control everyone around her, even as she herself obsequiously submits herself to the control of those she believes can help her advance socially or economically.

They see the walls of the gymnasium fading into an exquisite transparency, the ceiling opening up like a flower into the brilliant sky above the Hanging Rock. The shadow of the Rock is flowing, luminous as water, across the shimmering plain and they are at the picnic, sitting on the warm dry grass under the gum trees. [...] The shadow of the Rock has grown darker and longer. They sit rooted to the ground and cannot move. The dreadful shape is a living monster lumbering towards them across the plain, scattering rocks and boulders. So near now, they can see the cracks and hollows where the lost girls lie rotting in a filthy cave.

Related Characters: Mademoiselle Dianne de Poitiers, Irma Leopold

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

During Irma’s visit to the school, she pops into the gymnastics class being led by Mademoiselle, her favorite teacher, in order to bid her and the rest of the Appleyard girls goodbye. As Irma steps into the gymnasium, however, her presence is met not with happy laughter or kind smiles but with abject fear and even hatred. As the girls watch Irma approach, they begin to have a kind of collective flashback to the picnic at Hanging Rock in which they all see the shadow of the rock transform into a terrible monster. The horrific vision is full of both whimsy and decay—and while Lindsay doesn’t say so explicitly, it seems as if the very forces which possessed Miranda, Marion, and Irma up on the rock seem to be possessing the Appleyard girls in this moment. Another reading of this passage allows for the possibility that the girls are allowing themselves, finally, to feel the fear and trauma they’ve been repressing since the day at the rock—and that their fear is so powerful it

overcomes and transforms them. This passage shows how nature and repression work together to create a perfect storm, winding repressed individuals tight as mousetraps until their fear, trauma, and anger bursts forth with an intensity resembling a force of nature.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☛☛ The clock on the stairs had just struck for half past twelve when the door of Mrs. Appleyard's room opened noiselessly, inch by inch, and an old woman carrying a nightlight came out on to the landing. An old woman with head bowed under a forest of curling pins, with pendulous breasts and sagging stomach beneath a flannel dressing-gown. No human being - not even Arthur - had ever seen her thus, without the battledress of steel and whalebone in which for eighteen hours a day the Headmistress was accustomed to face the world.

Related Characters: Sara Waybourne, Mrs. Appleyard

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mrs. Appleyard sneaks from her room in the middle of the night in order to peek in at the now-empty room that once belonged to Sara and Miranda—two girls who are now gone from the college forever. Mrs. Appleyard, normally a repressed and collected woman who would never allow herself to be seen in a certain manner of undress, now stalks through the college in that very disheveled state. This speaks to the fact that her mind and faculties have broken down in the wake of all she's been through lately—from the disappearance at Hanging Rock to her ongoing conflict with the orphan Sara Waybourne, with the latter threat possibly having ended in cold-blooded murder. Lindsay never makes clear whether Sara's death is an accident or an act of malice—but this passage, which demonstrates Mrs. Appleyard's haunted and seemingly decayed mental state, it becomes clear that whatever has happened, Mrs. Appleyard has at last lost control, and may even be willing to start admitting that fact to herself.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☛☛ “You know very well I'm not one for gossip. What is it you want to find out?”

He grinned. “Shrewd little woman, aren't you? I've been wondering if you ever heard any of your lady friends mention Mrs. Appleyard at the College?” In Bumpher's experience it was amazing how an ordinary housewife seemed to know by instinct things that might take a policeman weeks to find out.

Related Characters: Constable Bumpher (speaker), Mrs. Appleyard

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

After Constable Bumpher receives a peculiar and distressing letter from Mademoiselle de Poitiers asking him to look into what she believes is yet another mysterious disappearance at the college—this time, the sudden disappearance of the put-upon orphan Sara Waybourne—he finds himself disturbed and upset. Hoping to gain some more insight into the major players in the situation, he puts aside his letter and asks his wife—who claims she's “not one for gossip,” though her husband knows that she is full of information about everyone in town—for some information about Mrs. Appleyard's and Mademoiselle's characters and dispositions. This passage demonstrates that while gossip and scandal have, throughout the novel, been portrayed as negative and decadent forces, there is actually an upside to the unfeeling mechanism of rumor. The chatter amongst the Constable's wife's “lady friends,” he knows, is bound to be more accurate than anything either the headmistress or the Frenchwoman would tell him—the Constable's awareness of this fact shows that gossip is useful and even vital in certain situations.

☛☛ About ten minutes later she was out in the drive waiting for the trap at the front door. She was wearing a long navy blue coat and a brown hat with a feather sticking up that I've seen her wearing when she goes to Melbourne. She was carrying a black leather handbag and black gloves because I wondered why a person would think of gloves at such a time.

Related Characters: Mr. Edward Whitehead (speaker), Mrs. Appleyard

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mr. Whitehead, the gardener at Appleyard College, delivers a police report to Constable Bumpher concerning his discovery of the body of Sara Waybourne in the hedges behind the school—and all that happened after. Mr. Whitehead describes finding the girl's mutilated corpse and immediately rushing up to tell Mrs. Appleyard about what he'd found. The woman reacted emotionally but not necessarily with surprise, unleashing an animalistic scream before collecting herself and ordering Mr. Whitehead to ready a carriage to take her into town immediately. Mr. Whitehead describes his shock upon seeing Mrs. Appleyard come downstairs to head into town—dressed to the nines, carrying a fine bag and wearing fancy gloves. This passage speaks to the ways in which Mrs. Appleyard's desire for control over not just her own image but her very surroundings has seeped into every aspect of her life. Mrs. Appleyard has always seemed like a woman with a secret—but this passage makes it clear that she relies on her appearance to project collectedness and even innocence when the reality seems to be that she is a guilty woman coming apart at the very seams.

Nothing else was said until we came to the bend in the road where you can first see the Hanging Rock coming up out of the trees in the distance. I pointed it out to her and said something about the Rock having made a lot of trouble for a lot of people since the day of the Picnic. She leaned right across me and shook her fist at it and I hope I never have to see an expression like that on another face.

Related Characters: Mr. Ben Hussey (speaker), Mrs. Appleyard

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mr. Ben Hussey, the owner of a local cab company which often lends its services to Appleyard College, describes being asked by Mrs. Appleyard to drive her out to Hanging Rock on the day of her death. As he recalls bringing Mrs. Appleyard around “the bend in the road where [one] can first see” the rock itself, he informs

Constable Bumpher, to whom he's giving a police report, of the horrifying reaction the headmistress had upon seeing the rock itself for the first time in her life.

This passage offers some key insights into the ways in which the rock has come to control Mrs. Appleyard's life in spite of her best attempts to resist the pull of the rock—itsself a symbol of the power of nature in the face of colonization's repressive, sanitizing forces. Mrs. Appleyard has been obsessed with presenting a composed, collected front to the world even in times of chaos and hardship—difficulties she blames on the rock itself. The novel implies that Mrs. Appleyard may have even resorted to cold-blooded murder in an attempt to exert control on her immediate environment. She felt so powerless and robbed of agency in the wake of the disappearances at Hanging Rock that she was compelled to use any means necessary to feel in control again—and now, she blames her entire life's misfortunes on the rock itself.

To the left, on higher ground, a pile of stones . . . on one of them a large black spider, spread-eagled, asleep in the sun. She had always been afraid of spiders, looked round for something with which to strike it down and saw Sara Waybourne, in a nightdress, with one eye fixed and staring from a mask of rotting flesh.

An eagle hovering high above the golden peaks heard her scream as she ran towards the precipice and jumped. The spider scuttled to safety as the clumsy body went bouncing and rolling from rock to rock towards the valley below. Until at last the head in the brown hat was impaled upon a jutting crag.

Related Characters: Sara Waybourne, Mrs. Appleyard

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 200-201

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mrs. Appleyard—who has traveled out to Hanging Rock to see and confront the place herself—finds herself face-to-face with a horrible vision of the “rotting” corpse of Sara Waybourne, a boarder whom she may or may not have murdered. At the sight of Sara's body—either a trick of Mrs. Appleyard's own guilty conscience or a projection created by the mysterious forces at work atop Hanging Rock—Mrs. Appleyard flings herself off the mountain to her death. This passage deepens the mystery of

what happened to the Appleyard College girls who went missing on Hanging Rock. Because Mrs. Appleyard seems to have a guilty conscience, it's impossible to say whether her own psyche drove her, quite literally, to the edge, or whether the rock has powers which manipulate and compel those who ascend it. Whether the Appleyard College girls

and their governess Miss McCraw flung themselves off the edge to their own deaths remains unknown—but what is clear is that Hanging Rock has, either by its own powers or by the power of the Appleyard College community's collective fear and hatred of the place, come to exert complete control over Mrs. Appleyard.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

It is February 14, 1900—a “shimmering summer morning” in Australia. As the boarders at Mrs. Appleyard’s College for Young Ladies scurry about the school in a “madly romantic” mood exchanging Valentine’s Day letters and gifts, there is a distinctive air of giddiness about the place. Though the only two men at the college are Mr. Whitehead, an elderly English gardener, and Tom, an Irish groom and stable hand, the girls pretend that their letters are from “lovesick admirers.”

The only person who does not receive a valentine is the head of the college. Mrs. Appleyard disapproves of Saint Valentine and dislikes the way the girls’ gifts and greetings clutter up the two-story mansion where Appleyard College is housed. Mrs. Appleyard purchased the manse less than six years ago yet has already transformed the place into an expensive and well-regarded college. Mrs. Appleyard—a greying widow obsessed with discipline and control—has no experience as an educator, but she gives off the distinct air of a traditional English headmistress, which has impressed parents in the school’s surrounding area. “Looking the part,” Mrs. Appleyard knows, is “more than half the battle.”

All the girls fuss over their valentines, from the beautiful, wealthy Miranda to the “plain,” froglike Edith to the haughty heiress Irma Leopold. The girls gossip about how one of the governesses, Miss Lumley, has received a card from her brother Reg, while their math teacher, Miss McCraw, has received a plain valentine covered in math equations from the groom Tom, who was encouraged to send it “for a lark” by his girlfriend, the housemaid Minnie. As the girls get ready for their outing, they’re all looking forward to their picnic and being out in nature. Mademoiselle Dianne de Poitiers, the young, beautiful French teacher, is just as excited about the holiday as her pupils. She hurries the girls to get ready to leave for the picnic as she passes through the halls.

The opening passages of the novel immediately begin touching upon the novel’s major themes. The girls at the heart of the book are repressed, hungry for attention, and fueled by gossip and fancy.



Mrs. Appleyard’s demeanor stands in stark contrast to her excitable students’ giddiness. She is practical and strait-laced and devoted to maintaining appearances above all else—and at any cost. Mrs. Appleyard sees femininity, and perhaps life in general, as a “battle” to be won.



The girls’ giddy celebrations continue in this passage as they play pranks, gossip, fight, and bond. The social environment at Appleyard College is one in which the lives of the faculty members hold just as much allure to the students as their own small personal dramas.



As the girls head out onto the verandah, Mrs. Appleyard greets them. She instructs the girls as to how they should behave on the outing, forbidding them from removing their gloves in spite of the heat until the carriage has passed through town. She reminds them to stay close together at the picnic and keep off of **Hanging Rock**—she tells them it is “extremely dangerous” and populated by venomous snakes. With those warnings, Mrs. Appleyard bids the girls goodbye and tells them she’ll see them at eight o’clock for supper. Mr. Hussey, the driver, pulls up to the front steps in a drag (covered wagon) pulled by five beautiful bay horses. The three senior girls—Miranda, Irma, and Marion—sit in the box up front. The rest of the girls pile into the back with Miss McCraw and Mademoiselle.

As the day grows hotter and the road grows bumpier. The girls beg to take their gloves off, and Miss McCraw tells them they can—but when they ask to remove their hats, she forbids it. After stopping briefly for some refreshing lemonade, the group sets off again. Miss McCraw is worried they’re not making good enough time, even though Mr. Hussey assures her they’re on schedule. Miss McCraw suggests that, to save time on the way back, Mr. Hussey look at their route this morning as two sides of an isosceles triangle—rather than follow the tracks back, she suggests, he should head straight down the invisible triangle’s third side. Mr. Hussey disregards the math teacher’s complex suggestion.

Soon enough, the group catches sight of the huge, imposing **Hanging Rock**. The excited Mr. Hussey begins giving the girls a miniature history lesson about the rock’s formation and million-year existence. As the drag pulls up to the wooden gate entry to the Picnic Grounds, Miranda excitedly hops down from her seat and opens it so that the drag can pass through.

CHAPTER 2

The group arrives at the picnic grounds at **Hanging Rock**. The grounds feature several manmade firepits and an outhouse in the shape of a Japanese pagoda. Together the girls lay out their picnic: a sprawling spread which features a cake in the shape of a heart. The group from the college is alone at the grounds but for a group of three or four people on the other side of the creek—Edith can see that they have a white Arab pony with them. She complains about the loneliness and solitude of the countryside and admits to being creeped out by the feeling that their group, out here, could be “the only living creatures in the whole world.” Edith pays no attention to the fact that the area around her is “teeming” with life.

As Mrs. Appleyard reminds the girls to be on their best behavior, her rigid approach to schooling and leading them becomes even more clear. She is obsessed not just with her own appearance, but with her pupils’—she wants them to look proper and dignified, and she hopes that their behavior outside of school will always reflect well upon the college. As the novel progresses, Mrs. Appleyard’s preoccupation with mitigating scandal and preserving her school’s reputation will intensify—and beg the question of whether Mrs. Appleyard is hiding from something in plain sight, determined to lay low.



Miss McCraw is strict and idealistic in a different way from Mrs. Appleyard. She is methodical and strait-laced, but she’s also highly logical. This passage establishes that Miss McCraw is a quick thinker who is aware of her surroundings and concerned with following the rules that have been set out for her.



The girls are excited to visit Hanging Rock—though they don’t know much about the site’s history (and though Lindsay herself does not disclose its sacred significance to several Aboriginal Australian tribes) it’s clear that the imposing, ancient rock inspires awe in the whole group.



This passage demonstrates the ways in which the schoolgirls are disconnected from experiences in and around nature. It also shows how Hanging Rock—itsself a natural marvel—has been tamed, sanitized, and indeed perverted by colonialism and tourism.



After eating their meal, the girls wash their dishes in the creek and enjoy some leisure time lying about. Irma and Miranda watch Mademoiselle dozing and admire her beauty. Mr. Hussey comes over to remind Mademoiselle that they must leave by five in order to make it back to the college on time. Mademoiselle asks what time it is now, but Mr. Hussey answers that he'd come over to ask that very question of Mademoiselle—his own watch has “stopped dead at twelve o'clock.”

Mr. Hussey suggests they head out in an hour. The brainy, studious Marion tells Mademoiselle that she wants to explore the base of the rock for a while to take some measurements, and Miranda and Irma say they want to go with her. Mademoiselle tells them to be careful and stay close. Edith asks to come along, and the other girls allow her to follow them. Mademoiselle does a quick head count of the girls around her—fifteen without the four who have gone on a walk—and, satisfied that they are all present, allows herself to doze off again.

The girls, meanwhile, follow the creek to the base of the rock, passing by the other group of picnickers—an older man in a toupee, a woman in a beautiful silk dress, a young man in riding breeches, and another youth in a coachman's cap who is washing the group's picnic dishes in the stream. The girls decide to cross the stream and bully Edith into leaping across in spite of her hesitation. As they hop across, the young man in the coachman's hat whistles at them. They hurry past him toward the rock.

The young man in breeches approaches the coachman and, addressing him as Albert, says he wishes he hadn't whistled at the girls just now—young girls don't like being whistled at. Albert says that “sheilas is all alike,” and asks if the girls might be from Appleyard College. Michael says that as he's only been in Australia a few weeks, he couldn't possibly know. Albert says he wishes he could've grown up somewhere nice like Appleyard College rather than the dank orphanage where he was raised. Albert's speech is coarse as he reminisces, and Michael urges him not to curse loudly, lest his own aunt and uncle fire Albert for being uncouth. Albert apologizes to “the Honourable Michael Fitzhubert,” and Michael, embarrassed, urges Albert to call him “Mike.”

Mr. Hussey is puzzled by the fact that his watch has suddenly stopped. This strange development, combined with the dreamy, soporific nature of the picnic create an atmosphere of mystery and suggest a remove from the “real” world.



Mademoiselle doesn't see the harm in letting the girls wander off for a little while—after all, they're seniors, and the area around the picnic grounds seems safe. Though Lindsay never explicitly says so, it's possible (given what happens to the girls up on the rock) that the hazy, good feelings saturating the picnic grounds is the work of the rock itself luring the girls in.



Joan Lindsay includes many stray observations and red herrings as she builds the mystery at the heart of the book. Introducing characters who watch the girls go up the rock—and even interact with them as they do—invests her readers in keeping tabs on all the details leading up to the mystery.



This passage introduces a new group of characters—the Fitzhuberts and their coachman Albert, who will come to be major players in the mystery as it unfolds over the course of the novel. Just as stratifications of wealth and class divide the world of Appleyard College, so too does this group of characters wrestle with their own social and cultural divisions.



Albert stands up to harness the horses for the journey back. Mike says he wants to take a walk to stretch his legs. Albert teases him about trying to catch another glimpse of the Appleyard girls—but as Mike nears the rock, he finds that the girls are out of sight already. He worries about them having decided to climb the rock—he knows it is treacherous for inexperienced climbers, especially young girls in fine dresses. Mike finds himself shocked that the girls are allowed to wander off alone in the first place, but then reminds himself that he is in Australia now—a place where “anything might happen.”

Mike, having recently arrived from England, finds Australia to be a place of infinite possibility—yet as the early chapters of the novel have shown, even in this uncharted place, the forces of colonialism and repression define daily life for the very girls Mike believes to be so independent and carefree.



CHAPTER 3

As the four Appleyard girls take in the full sight of **Hanging Rock**, they are stunned and awed into silence by its hugeness. Marion says the peaks must be a million years old. Edith, who can't imagine a million of anything, urges her to be quiet. Edith asks if they can sit down and look at the mount from their current position, but Marion says the three senior girls are pushing ahead—and Edith must too, since she begged to come along with them. Irma comforts Edith by assuring her they'll all be back at the picnic grounds soon for some cake and tea.

The other girls enjoy toying with Edith, messing with her sense of perception by talking about the almost incomprehensibly ancient history of the rock. Edith's fear of the rock's indeterminate age suggests her larger fear of the unseen and the unknown.



Though Miranda warns Marion that they should turn back soon, Irma suggests they head up to the first rise. The girls are all struggling with the terrain in their boots and dresses, but soon they make it to a small rise from which they can look down on the picnic grounds below. The girls stop to rest. They take off their boots and sit in the shade gossiping. Soon, Edith says she isn't feeling very well. She asks if any of the other girls noticed the handsome young man in breeches down by the creek. Marion tells Edith to shut up, and Edith begins crying. Miranda strokes her cheek. Irma, overcome with feeling and tenderness at Miranda's kind gesture, gets up and begins dancing, imagining herself a ballerina performing onstage in London.

As the girls climb higher and higher up the mountain, they divest themselves of their constricting clothes and shoes and begin to feel lighthearted, giddy, and freer in their bodies and minds. The rock is a place that's dangerous and mysterious—but it is the most remote natural wonder the girls have ever seen, and being around it frees them, just a little, from their sense of repression.



Irma's reverie is interrupted when Edith gets her attention and points out that Miranda and Marion are headed barefoot up the rock. Irma, to Edith's horror, picks up her boots and stockings and follows them. Soon, the girls arrive at the next even plateau. As they look down, Marion remarks that the people below them have begun to look small and purposeless as ants. The girls stop again to rest and soon fall asleep in the shelter of a large stone. A lizard curls itself in the crook of Marion's arm, while a group of beetles crawl over Miranda's ankle.

As the girls climb higher and higher onto the rock—and deeper into nature—they lose their attachment, it seems, to the world below. Wary just hours ago of being in nature, they now let insects and animals crawl on their bare flesh. The rock seems to have put the girls in a kind of trance—or transported them into a world in which the freedom of nature liberates them from their sense of social repression.



Edith wakes from her nap with a start. She calls out to Miranda, asking when they can all go back. As she looks up, she sees the three senior girls standing around her, looking at her strangely. Without answering Edith, the three of them turn and head further up the trail. Edith notices that they are hardly even walking—they seem to be gliding. Edith calls for the girls to stop and come back, but soon they are all out of sight. Edith, overcome by horror, begins screaming as she runs down the mountain.

The mystery thickens as the senior girls appear to be transported by a supernatural force, carried higher and higher up the mountain. How or why Edith is immune to this force is unclear—but what is certain is that she marks it immediately as a sinister threat.



CHAPTER 4

At four o'clock on the afternoon of the picnic, Mrs. Appleyard awakes from a nap on the drawing-room sofa—she has been dreaming of her late husband. She heads upstairs and enters a classroom to check on Sara Waybourne, the school's youngest boarder. Sara has been held back from the picnic and made to memorize a poem she failed to recite in class the day before. Mrs. Appleyard tells Sara that if she's completed her work, she can go out to the garden for some tea and cake. The defiant Sara, however, insists she can't—and won't—commit the "silly" poem to memory. Mrs. Appleyard tells her that if she doesn't have the original piece memorized in half an hour she'll be sent to bed without supper.

This passage introduces the vendetta between Mrs. Appleyard and her youngest boarder, the orphaned Sara Waybourne. The root of the duo's animosity is unknown and never explained, leaving room for readers to speculate as to why Mrs. Appleyard has it in for Sara. What is clear is that Mrs. Appleyard is determined to change or even break Sara by any means necessary.



By the time eight o'clock arrives, the night has grown dark. The "unrepentant" Sara has been sent to bed, and Mrs. Appleyard, having eaten a large supper of her own, waits for the sound of the drag coming up the drive. At half past eight, however, Mrs. Appleyard begins to get worried—Mr. Hussey is usually punctual. Mrs. Appleyard rings for Minnie and asks her if Tom is still up. Minnie, disguising the fact that she and Tom have been fooling around on her bed, tells Mrs. Appleyard she'll look for him.

This passage shows that Appleyard College is, in spite of all of Mrs. Appleyard's best efforts to keep the place dignified and tightly run, not immune to the forces of scandal, mystery, or uncertainty.



Near ten o'clock, Mrs. Appleyard goes downstairs to the front door to find Tom waiting on the porch. She asks him if Mr. Hussey's lateness could be due to a long trek back, but Tom assures her that it would take three and a half hours at most to get back from **Hanging Rock**—assuming the group left at four, they should be home by now. Mrs. Appleyard becomes worried that the coach has had an accident. Tom tells Mrs. Appleyard to calm down and listen—sure enough, the sound of hooves can be heard.

As the novel progresses, Mrs. Appleyard's intense anxieties about the whereabouts and safety of her pupils will be shown to be less about the girls' well-being than about her own horror of scandal, disorder, and uncontrollable or unseen forces.



As the drag pulls up, the girls begin pouring from the back. They are “hatless, disheveled, [and] incoherent.” As Mademoiselle follows them up the steps, Mrs. Appleyard asks what has happened. Mademoiselle responds that she doesn’t know where to start. Mrs. Appleyard asks where Miss McCraw is, and Mademoiselle answers that she’s been left behind at the **rock**. Mrs. Appleyard demands answers, but Mr. Hussey steps in, noting that Mademoiselle looks faint. Sure enough, Mademoiselle promptly passes out, and Minnie, Miss Lumley, and the cook hurry to revive her and carry her to her room. Mrs. Appleyard brings Mr. Hussey up to her study and asks what has happened. Mr. Hussey tells her the trouble is that no one knows what has happened—Miss McCraw and three girls have gone missing at the rock.

In the novel’s first departure from narrative, the narrator inserts an excerpt of Mr. Hussey’s statement to Constable Bumper of the Woodend Police the following morning. He describes realizing, early on in the afternoon, that both his and Miss McCraw’s watches had stopped. The group decided to leave in an hour, and Hussey got to work harnessing the horses. He believes that at this time it was nearly half past three. After harnessing them up, he returned to check on the tea and found that Miss McCraw had left the group. Mademoiselle was flustered and upset, having fallen asleep and failed to see where Miss McCraw might have gone. Hussey asked if everyone else was accounted for, and Mademoiselle admitted that four girls had gone off to the **rock**—Miranda, Irma Leopold, Marion Quade, and Edith Horton.

Mr. Hussey and Mademoiselle organized the other girls into groups of two and three and sent them around the creek to call for the missing members of their party. After about an hour, Edith came “running out of the scrub [...] crying and laughing.” Edith reported that the other girls were up on the **rock**, but had no idea what direction they’d gone. Mr. Hussey wanted to ask the group he’d seen picnicking across the creek if they’d seen anything, but the group—Colonel Fitzhubert and his family—had already left.

Mr. Hussey reports that the group returned down the mountain and made fires as it got darker out, continuing to call for the missing girls and Miss McCraw. After several hours, though, Hussey and Mademoiselle—noting that the girls were growing more and more hysterical—decided to turn and head home. Mr. Hussey concludes his statement by admitting that he doesn’t know whether leaving was the right thing to do.

Nothing scares Mrs. Appleyard more than losing control—and as the group of students and staff return from Hanging Rock, it becomes clear that a situation completely beyond anyone’s control has begun to unfold. Picnic at Hanging Rock is an unusual novel in that its climactic moment occurs early on, leaving the majority of the text to track the fallout of that mysterious climax as the book’s characters attempt to reckon with what’s happened.



Joan Lindsay constructed Picnic at Hanging Rock as a true crime novel—“excerpts” from “real” documents like this one that appear throughout the book led many of the novel’s early readers to believe that the disappearances at Hanging Rock were the stuff of historical fact rather than fanciful fiction.



Edith’s hysterical reaction to whatever happened up on the rock is perhaps meant to convey the combined horror, relief, and amusement she feels after watching three of the school’s star pupils so thoroughly divest themselves of the codes of conduct, rules, and regulations that have defined their life at school.



Mr. Hussey’s guilt over having left the missing group behind—even though there was nothing more he could do to find or help them—is evident from his statement.



CHAPTER 5

The day after the picnic, Sunday, is a “nightmare” for the students and staff at Appleyard College. Mrs. Appleyard is, after a sleepless night, determined not to let a word of what has happened get out. Trips into town to attend church are cancelled, and the girls are instructed to keep their mouths shut—only Mr. Hussey’s confidential report to the police is permitted. While Mrs. Appleyard is able to control the traumatized girls, however, the staff—including Tom, Minnie, and Miss Lumley—whisper about the incident to one another throughout the day.

The town doctor, Doctor McKenzie, comes to check up on the girls and Mademoiselle. He pronounces Mademoiselle and the students to be in good health. The only thing that disturbs McKenzie is the fact that Edith Horton claims to have no memory of anything that happened up on the **rock**.

Constable Bumper and a young officer come to visit and talk with Mrs. Appleyard. They assure her that “city people” are always getting lost in the woods and the bush, and that the girls and Miss McCraw will soon be found. Mrs. Appleyard says that Miranda—the school’s head girl—was “born and bred in the bush” and should know better than to get lost, but the police again promise her that the matter will be cleared up within hours.

The police begin a search of the rock but are unable to locate any tracks or footprints. They decide to bring in an Aboriginal Australian tracker and several bloodhounds, and also enlist the help of Michael Fitzhubert and Albert Crundall. By Sunday evening, in spite of Mrs. Appleyard’s best efforts, the surrounding towns are swarming with gossip about the missing girls.

At the crack of dawn on Monday, a young reporter shows up at the front door of the college—though he’s turned away, others appear throughout the day. Mrs. Appleyard lets no reporters, visitors, or concerned neighbors inside. Classes are suspended for the day, and though meals are served at their regular times, most of the girls are too distressed to eat. Sara, who idolized Miranda, is particularly upset.

Mrs. Appleyard’s first order of business is not to ask anyone she can for help, seek support from her community, or comfort her traumatized students—rather it’s to keep the entire ordeal under wraps and preserve an outward-facing mask of control and calm togetherness.



Edith Horton’s lack of memory is one of the most mysterious aspects of the case—and foreshadows the ways in which experiences up on the rock will tamper with other people’s memories as the novel unfolds.



The police don’t want Mrs. Appleyard to panic, and assure her that everything will be okay. Mrs. Appleyard knows, though, that something must be terribly wrong for even the capable and savvy Miranda to still be missing.



The efforts to find the missing young women soon involve the whole community—and at that point, even the control-hungry Mrs. Appleyard can no longer contain the flames of gossip spreading through town.



In the wake of the disappearances, it seems as if normalcy will never return to Appleyard college. Not only has the social atmosphere of the place been upset and forever changed, but the school is now the subject of scrutiny and intrigue.



On Tuesday, Michael Fitzhubert and Albert Crundall give their statements to the authorities. Michael gives his testimony, recalling how he watched the girls leap over the creek one by one and head up onto the rock. He says that though he himself went for a stroll at its base several minutes later, the group was already out of sight. He thought nothing more of the girls and went home with his aunt, uncle, and Albert shortly thereafter. After securing Michael's statement, Bumpher points out that Michael recalled seeing only three girls hop over the creek. Michael amends his statement and says there was indeed a fourth girl—but the last girl was a "little fat one." The policeman asks if Michael was interested in the senior girls, but he denies looking at them closely.

While Michael gives his statement to Bumpher in the comfort of his aunt and uncle's home at Lake View, Albert gives his to the younger policeman, Jim Grant, at the Woodend station. Albert deliberately jerks the young cop around during the interview, cursing and joking with him. The policeman is unprofessional, too, asking for Albert to sneak him a ride on Michael's prize Arab pony. The policeman asks if Michael, riding his own mount, was with the carriage the entire way back to Lake View. Albert assures the policeman that he was.

The press gets hold of the story and dubs it the College Mystery—the lurid tale is sensationalized in the papers over the course of the week. There are still no new clues or leads—but "the public must be fed." The articles exaggerate Michael's wealth, Irma's beauty, and the strangeness of the whole affair.

An investigator from the city arrives at the college early Wednesday morning to take Edith back to the picnic grounds to perhaps jog her memory. Bumpher accompanies them, promising Mrs. Appleyard they'll be easy on the already "bamboozled" Edith. Back at the picnic grounds, the police officers ask Edith to walk them through the afternoon again, describing how the girls set off in the first place. Edith details how Marion teased her all the way along the creek and up to the **rock**, and remembers wanting to sit down along the trail. Bumpher asks if there was a special rock or log she remembers seeing, but Edith says there wasn't.

Michael must again face—and again try to deny—his intense interest in the girls. Lindsay paints his interest as suspect, though later on in the novel, she will explore more deeply his fascination with the girls and his emotional connection to their collective disappearance.



Michael's genteel, polite interview is contrasted against Albert's more crass, down-to-earth rapport with Jim. This is one of the novel's many ways of contrasting the two young men's social positions and showing how different life is for each of them.



Lindsay takes a sarcastic view of the public's need to be "fed" a steady stream of gossip and scandal—even when no real news or facts are available.



At first, it seems that the police officers' plan is a futile one—one that will only further traumatize the already-upset Edith. Edith remembers very little from her ascent up the rock, it would seem—she can only recall things that happened at its base and lower levels, and, it will soon be revealed, on the way back down. Everything that happened on its peaks, however, remains a mystery, suggesting that some kind of supernatural force may be at work.



Edith tells the policemen she does remember seeing something strange—a “nasty red” cloud which appeared to her shortly after she passed Miss McCraw on her way down the mountain. The investigators are shocked by this information—Edith hasn’t mentioned encountering Miss McCraw in any of her other statements. Edith says she saw the woman at a distance on her way back down. Though she was far away from the teacher, she could see that Miss McCraw looked “funny.” The investigators press her for details, and Edith reveals that Miss McCraw had stripped down to her drawers.

The police return Edith to the college, where Mrs. Appleyard is overwhelmed with the number of letters pouring in from the press, from neighbors, and from concerned parents of the girls still remaining at the school. Mrs. Appleyard knows she has to write to the parents of Miranda and Irma and the legal guardian of Marion informing them that the girls are missing. She is dreading writing the letters, and wishes the girls had all come back from the picnic that fateful Saturday just as crisp, clean, and orderly as she sent them off. Mrs. Appleyard knows that losing three senior girls will damage the “prestige and social standing” of the college, and wishes that Edith or Sara had disappeared instead.

Mrs. Appleyard buckles down and begins a letter to the “fabulously rich” Leopolds who live in India but who, according to Irma’s last letters to them, are on holiday in the Himalayas. Mrs. Appleyard then writes to Miranda’s parents—well-to-do owners of cattle ranches who are “not quite in the millionaire class.” She then writes a third and final letter to Marion’s legal guardian—a family solicitor who is away in New Zealand. Mrs. Appleyard writes a perfunctory letter to the elderly father of Miss McCraw, then stamps them and brings them downstairs to the hall table for Tom to post.

CHAPTER 6

On Thursday afternoon, Michael and Albert sit drinking in the boathouse at Lake View. Albert is on a break, and Mike is hiding from his aunt’s garden party. Albert has narrowly avoided serving champagne at the party by reminding Michael’s uncle that he is a coachman, “not a bloody waiter.” As Albert recounts this story, Michael laughs. Since the afternoon of the picnic, Mike and Albert—close in age but worlds away in terms of social standing—have become fast friends. The “accident[s] of birth” that have placed the men on opposite ends of the social spectrum mean nothing to them. They talk about small, local matters and their own daily concerns—never politics or society.

The new information Edith provides about Miss McCraw—compelled, just as the senior girls were, to divest herself of her entrapping clothes—adds further mystery to the situation and suggests that the rock exerted powerful a psychological force on Miss McCraw as well as the girls



Mrs. Appleyard doesn't seem all that concerned about her missing students' well-being, or that of Miss McCraw. She wants the disappearances not to have happened—but not because she misses any of her pupils or her colleague, rather because she dreads the school's exposure to scandal (and thus her own.)



Mrs. Appleyard writes the letters begrudgingly, counting on the fact that in several cases they won't reach their intended recipients for a good while. She hopes that the scandal will be resolved by then so that she won't have to deal with any of the consequences—or disappoint the wealthy parents and guardians whom she sees as customers rather than people.



The burgeoning friendship between Albert and Mike serves, throughout the novel, to highlight the major differences in wealth and class which define the lives of those who live in the Australian outback. While Mike is bored by his aunt's garden parties, that's about as bad as his life gets—Albert, on the other hand, can't even conceive of such luxury.



The men's conversation soon turns to the ongoing search at **Hanging Rock**. Albert says he's heard that even more trackers have been called to the scene. If they can't find the girls, Albert says, the girls must be "bushed"—lost forever to the wilderness. Mike, however, is perturbed by the girls' disappearance. He's convinced that they're still somewhere on the rock, suffering and perhaps even dying while the rest of the world has garden parties. Albert suggests Mike forget the whole thing, but Mike says he can't. Mike confesses that he's been thinking of a plan to search Hanging Rock on his own—he asks if Albert will accompany him. Albert reluctantly agrees, and the two make a plan to set out at dawn the next day.

Out at **Hanging Rock**, Constable Bumpher finds himself frustrated with the day's "unrewarding" search. Edith's information has led the search in a new direction, and though they've turned up a piece of fabric that may have come from Miss McCraw's underwear, the search party is still nowhere near finding her or the girls. Though the bloodhounds have growled and barked at different points on the rock, searches for tracks, prints, or belongings at those peculiar points have proved unsuccessful.

Back at Lake View, after the party is over, Mike finds himself discussing the search with his uncle, Colonel Fitzhubert. Fitzhubert believes the search is doomed, and that the girls are "dead as mutton." Mike asks his uncle if he can take the Arab pony out the next day for a ride with Albert—he lies and says they're going to tour another nearby rock formation. Fitzhubert gives Mike permission but warns him to be back in time for dinner—and tells him they're expected for tennis at a neighbor's on Saturday. Mike thanks his uncle and heads up to bed, his thoughts consumed with how to prepare for the journey ahead.

CHAPTER 7

At dawn, Mike sneaks from the house to meet Albert at the stables. Albert shows Mike the provisions he's packed—including rags and iodine in case of injury—and the two set off. As they ride down the road, Mike observes the wealthy households all around waking up for the day. He notes that at many of these homes, the "virgin forest" sprawls out to meet "immaculate tennis lawn[s]" and carefully-pruned orchards.

Though the sardonic, crass Albert believes there's no use in looking for the missing "sheilas," Mike—driven by some noble desire to be the hero or by a fascination with the girls themselves—knows there's more they both can do before giving up on the lost young ladies forever.



This passage, an interlude to the scene with Mike and Albert, shows that the search party at the rock is not making any real progress—they do, it turns out, need help from concerned citizens and neighbors.



Mike knows that he must keep parts of his life secret from his aunt and uncle—the wealthy and self-concerned couple would not smile on Mike's desire to risk his neck out in the bush hunting down stray schoolgirls.



The repressive forces of colonialism and wealth meet directly with the untamed forces of verdant nature in this passage as Mike observes the way the forest threatens to infringe on the manicured lawns of his rich neighbors.



Soon enough, the two men enter “the green gloom of the forest,” and Albert leads them to a trail that will take them to the far side of **Hanging Rock**. As the men approach the rock, Albert observes that Mike looks nervous—he suggests they eat as soon as they get to the creek. Once down there, Mike is shocked to see that little has changed at the picnic grounds since Saturday—the ashes from the fire he and Albert built on Valentine’s Day are even still there. Albert heats up some food and urges Mike to eat, but Mike isn’t hungry. After scarfing down some food, Albert falls asleep. Mike goes over to the creek and remembers watching the girls hopping over one by one.

Albert wakes from his nap and asks Mike where they should start their search. They decide to split up, searching for any fallen tree or cave that might be sheltering the girls. Albert sets off up the **rock** from the point where Edith was seen emerging from the trail, wondering if Mike has led them both on a “wild bloody goose chase.” As Mike makes his way up another slope, he finds himself awed by the sights and sounds of the dense forest and rich natural life all around him. He wonders if he is on the same path the girls trod themselves days ago. He finds himself thinking of the beautiful Miranda, whose name he knows because he heard her friends shout it to her as she crossed the creek.

At a certain point in his wandering, Mike hears Albert calling to him—he remembers they were supposed to meet at the creek at four. He realizes he has lost track of time, and, after marking the spot on the trail with several pieces of paper from his notebook, heads back to the picnic grounds. He and Albert sip some tea and talk about their walks—neither has anything to report. Albert suggests they pack it in for the day, but Mike says he has no intention of going home. He urges Albert to make up an excuse on his behalf. Albert warns Mike that it’s dangerous to stay out in the bush overnight, but Mike, furious with how the search has been handled, declares his intent to keep looking for the girls on his own.

Albert leaves some food and pony feed for Mike. With a warning to Mike not to let his campfire start a blaze in the brush, Albert mounts his horse and heads off the way they came. Mike knows that he can’t search or be useful until dawn, at least, and so he builds a small campfire and falls asleep. He has a restless night and wakes every couple of hours anxious for dawn.

It's clear that Albert is more laissez-faire about his and Mike's independent search than Mike is by far. Mike wants answers, and he wants them now—he cannot eat or rest peacefully until he has them.



This passage makes it clear that part of Mike's preoccupation with the girls' disappearance stems from his infatuation with Miranda. He wants to find her and rescue her—and though his reasons for setting out into the wilderness are, here, revealed to be slightly selfish, his heart is in the right place, and he is challenging himself in new, unexpected ways.



Again, time seems to function strangely up on the rock. People are always tired at its base and disoriented as they climb, uncertain of how they occupy and take up space and time. These phenomena deepen the mystery—and up the danger quotient Mike is facing by staying overnight.



It's perhaps a little foolish for Mike to stay overnight even though he can't search 'til dawn—but this fact makes his investment in finding the girls as soon as possible all the more evident.



As Mike sets off up to the rock again, he feels relief in spite of the rough terrain and dense brush. He finds the spot he marked on the trail the day before with ease and is shocked when a wallaby hops across his path. He wonders what the wallaby has seen these last few days, and what it might know. The wallaby disappears into the brush and Mike climbs on, exhausted, hungry, and out of breath, yet compelled to move higher and higher up the rock. At last, he stops to rest on a large rock, falling into a “ragged” sleep.

Mike wakes to a sudden stab of pain over his eye and realizes that his head is bleeding profusely. He is freezing, disoriented, and believes he can hear high peals of laughter all around him. Mike feels himself drifting back to sleep. He fights his way through bizarre dreams for an unknown amount of time before waking again, certain that he can hear Miranda laughing just ahead of him up the path. His head is still bleeding. Mike calls out for her and begins running through the brush, but soon finds that the path is barred by huge boulders. He begins climbing over the rocks, calling for Miranda the whole time.

Mike encounters strange bits of nature on his way up the rock, spotting a wallaby just as the girls found themselves surrounded (and covered) by insects and amphibians. Again, Lindsay invokes the rock’s soporific effect—perhaps to suggest that Mike is letting the rock take hold of him, just as the girls did.



Something has clearly transpired while Mike has been “asleep”—whether rocks have fallen on him, an animal has attacked him, or whether he has simply believed himself to be asleep while actually doing something else, it’s clear that the rock has a mysterious and powerful hold over all (or almost all) of those who venture onto it.



CHAPTER 8

On Friday night, as Albert heads back to Lake View, he is perturbed by how worried he is for Mike—he’s not used to being concerned for anyone but himself. After stabling his horse and eating supper in the kitchen, the cook warns Albert that Colonel Fitzhubert is cross that Mike isn’t back yet. Albert, knowing he must make an excuse on behalf of his friend, goes up to the Colonel’s study and tells the man that Michael wanted to stay at the Macedon Arms—a shabby pub several towns away—rather than ride back so late at night. Fitzhubert is annoyed, but happy that Michael is all right.

Albert retreats to his room and tries to fall asleep. Though he’s normally out the second his head hits the pillow each night, tonight, he’s disturbed by dreams of Mike screaming for help from far away. The next morning, Albert is relieved to see the dawn. He wolfs a quick breakfast and immediately goes to the stable to fetch a horse so that he can ride back to **Hanging Rock**. On the way, Albert notices that there are no new tracks on the path he and Mike took yesterday—but at the picnic ground, he finds Mike’s prize Arab pony untethered and unsaddled, roaming anxiously.

Albert really likes Mike and wants to be a good friend to him. He’s concerned for him, he’s willing to lie for him, and he’s not afraid of putting his own life and livelihood on the line to help his friend pursue something important.



Albert is so worried about Mike that he returns to the rock at the first available opportunity, shirking his own professional duties in order to check on his friend.



Albert ties up both horses and sits near the creek, wondering where Mike has gone—and fearing the young man has gotten himself lost on the treacherous **rock**. Albert locates Mike's boot tracks and follows them up the rock. Soon enough he finds Mike himself unconscious on the ground, looking deathly pale and covered in scratches on his arms and face—there is a particularly deep gash in his forehead. Albert shoos away the ants and flies that are circling Mike's body, gives the barely-conscious Mike some brandy, then leaves him to go for help.

Albert saddles up Mike's pony, knowing the horse will be fresher and more energetic. Not too far down the path toward Woodend, Albert encounters a shepherd and flags the man down for help. The shepherd, it turns out, has just said goodbye to Doctor McKenzie, and urges Albert to follow the doctor down the road. Albert soon catches up with the doctor, explains the situation, and leads him back to the rock. Albert leads McKenzie up the **rock** to Mike. McKenzie cleans and tends Mike's wounds, telling Albert that Mike's suffered no serious damage—he just needs to get to a bed where he can rest. Albert and the doctor carry Mike down the mountain and load him into the doctor's cart. Albert shows the doctor the way back to Lake View.

Back at the house, servants and housemaids hurry to help Albert, McKenzie, and the Colonel get Mike into a warm bed. The Colonel, furious and concerned, wants to question Michael, but the doctor insists the boy be left alone to rest. The Colonel rounds on Albert, calling him out for lying about Mike's whereabouts the night before, but McKenzie points out that Albert actually saved Mike's very life. The Colonel extends his hand to Albert and thanks him for his help in getting Mike home, then urges him get some rest himself.

Albert eats, feeds the horses, and flings himself onto his bed, where he falls into a deep sleep. At first light, however, he wakes with a start, plagued by questions of how Mike's journey up **the rock** went so horribly wrong. He quietly dresses and hurries up to the house, where he enters Mike's room. Mike's breeches are slung over the back of a chair, and Albert searches the pockets for his friend's notebook. He sees a recent entry which reads "ALBERT ABOVE BUSH MY FLAGS HURRY RING OF HIGH UP HIGH HURRY FOUN". Realizing that the clue signals the fact that Mike did find something important up on the rock, Albert tears the page from the book.

Albert sees that something terrible has befallen Mike—but his friend is in too poor of shape to communicate what's happened to him. Albert knows that Mike's life is now in his hands, and springs into action on behalf of his friend.



Albert springs into action upon realizing that his friend is in need. He complained about being on a "wild goose chase" for the "sheilas"—but for Mike, he's willing to run down a country doctor to ensure his friend's safe recovery.



The Colonel is ready to turn on Albert and excoriate the man—his family's servant—for getting Mike into trouble. When he learns, however, just what Albert has done on Mike's behalf, he softens toward the man and reevaluates his own prejudice and quickness to anger toward someone in his employ.



Albert, like Mike, becomes transfixed by the mysteries that have transpired up on Hanging Rock. He knows he must finish the work his friend has started—and as his intuition leads him down a new path, he gathers others together to try to solve the mystery as best they can.



Albert asks a housemaid to rouse the Colonel. He tells the man what he's discovered, and Fitzhubert sends an errand boy to the police station to notify them. Albert rides off to the **rock** to join the search party there—meanwhile, the young policeman Jim Grant and an on-call physician, Doctor Cooling, make their way to the rock as well. Albert, Jim, and Cooling head up the rock in search of Mike's hazy clue. As they climb, Jim remarks how amazing it is that Mike—a novice climber new to the bush—made it this far up. Albert defends Mike, stating that he has “more bloody brains and guts” than the three of them put together. The doctor, unconvinced that they're on anything but a goose chase, decides to sit and wait while the other two men go on up ahead.

Jim and Albert continue to climb, working to decipher Mike's bizarre note as they do. As they approach the large boulders which originally stopped Mike's path, they spot something on the ground. On a rock near the lower of the two boulders, one of the Appleyard girls is lying on the ground. The men whistle for the doctor, though from the flies buzzing about the girl's head, they fear they're too late. When the doctor catches up to them, however, he finds that the girl has a pulse. Albert runs for the stretcher while Cooling and Jim inspect the girl. Her bare feet are clean and unbruised.

Jim Grant returns to the police station and gives his report to Bumpher. Albert and Cooling bring the girl back to Lake View and place her under the care of the gardener's wife, Mrs. Cutler, who is surprised when the girl arrives wearing no corset—a “valuable clue” which will, the narrator says, never be communicated to the police or to the other students at Appleyard, who know Irma Leopold to be “fastidious” and never without a corset.

Doctor Cooling examines Irma further and reports that she is in good health but for shock and exposure. The Colonel states that Irma can stay at the house until she's well enough to move. When Doctor McKenzie arrives that evening to check in on Michael, he and Cooling meet to discuss the odd developments in the case. Both doctors admit that they'd do anything to know what happened up on the rock—and where the other girls are. McKenzie stops in at Irma's room. He wonders what—if anything—she'll report when she wakes up.

While others remain skeptical of Albert—and of Mike's clue—Albert believes that his friend is truly on to something. He is defensive of his friend's brains, heart, and bravery as he tries to inspire a group of people to undertake the very “wild goose chase” he himself recently doubted.



The discovery one of the Appleyard College girls proves that Mike was onto something at the time of his injury—though it is impossible to say what he saw or endured before or after finding the girl's body. The doctor and policeman are flabbergasted by the girl's pristine, uninjured condition, which further adds to the mystery of what has been happening on the rock.



The fact that Irma was discovered without her corset—a tool of patriarchal and colonial repression and control—shows that she, and perhaps the other girls, tried to free themselves of their connections to the constricting reality of their world while up on the rock.



The doctors, police, and locals remain in suspense as they wait for Irma to awake, believing that she will perhaps provide an answer to the many mysteries of Hanging Rock and the disappearances that have transpired there.



Mike spends several days suspended between dreams and wakefulness, vaguely aware of the comings and goings of his nurses and family members but trapped in a thick half-sleep in which he is “forever seeking some unknown nameless thing.” One morning, he wakes up to find a doctor standing over him. He asks how long he’s been unconscious, and McKenzie reports that it has been five or six days since Mike was brought back from **Hanging Rock** in bad shape. Mike has no memory of what’s happened.

The next day, Mike asks his nurse if he can see Albert. The nurse says that Mike isn’t allowed visitors—but lets him know that Albert has come to his rooms every morning asking after him. Mike tells the nurse that he doesn’t care about his doctor’s orders—he demands she let Albert in to see him when he calls later that morning. The indignant nurse instead fetches the Colonel, who surprisingly echoes Mike’s orders and demands the nurse let his nephew visit with the man who saved his life.

Later that morning, Albert arrives for a visit. Mike is grateful to see his friend, but wastes no time in asking for the details of what transpired at the **rock**—he doesn’t recall going back, but has discerned from conversations between his aunt and his nurse that the two of them went out there to search for the girls. Albert tells Mike that he’s correct—and adds that Mike found one of the girls, “the little dark one,” who is alive and living at Lake View for the time being. Mike seems disappointed that Miranda was not the one recovered from the rock. Sensing Mike’s sadness, Albert stands up and leaves.

CHAPTER 9

In the days after Irma is found, local papers are emblazoned with the headline “GIRL’S BODY ON ROCK – MISSING HEIRESS FOUND.” Irma, however, is still unconscious, and Michael is hardly well enough to be questioned—in the absence of new information, gossip and rumors proliferate through the towns neighboring Lake View and Appleyard College. The search for the other three victims continues and even intensifies in the wake of the discovery of Irma.

Mrs. Appleyard “briefly and formally” tells the students at her college that Irma has been found on Monday morning just before the start of classes—the girls are hysterically happy, but as the day goes by and classes get underway, the students and teachers alike refrain from discussing the news further.

Mike’s dreams seem to suggest that he is still seeking Miranda in sleep, and has no memory of finding Irma or perhaps coming down from the rock at all. When he awakes, he confirms this fact—a fact that further deepens the mysterious properties of Hanging Rock’s power to obliterate memory.



Because of Mike’s social standing and his family’s influence, he’s able to argue back against the help his aunt and uncle have hired and make things go his way—while his family’s employees are forced to submit to his whims.



Mike’s disappointment in realizing that Irma was recovered—while Miranda is still missing—is palpable and profound. This suggests a selfishness in his venture up to the rock in the first place, but also, on the other hand, might demonstrate a kind of selflessness—he was willing to put the object of his affection’s well-being before his own.



Even though Irma has been found—in quite a sensational manner—the press and the community surrounding the school continue to demand more and more information and new press. Nothing is enough—and in the absence of hard facts, gossip reigns.

Even though Irma has been found—in quite a sensational manner—the press and the community surrounding the school continue to demand more and more information and new press. Nothing is enough—and in the absence of hard facts, gossip reigns.



Mrs. Appleyard doesn’t seem to take any particular joy in Irma’s having been found—it’s almost as if Irma’s discovery hasn’t made a big enough impact on the press or the community to convince Mrs. Appleyard that things are on the upswing. The headmistress is, again, not concerned with anyone’s wellbeing—only appearances.

Mrs. Appleyard doesn’t seem to take any particular joy in Irma’s having been found—it’s almost as if Irma’s discovery hasn’t made a big enough impact on the press or the community to convince Mrs. Appleyard that things are on the upswing. The headmistress is, again, not concerned with anyone’s wellbeing—only appearances.



The next day, Mrs. Appleyard begins making some changes around the college. She decides that a “mild relaxation of discipline” is the best course of action. She paints the boarders’ sitting-room pink, brings a grand piano into the house, festoons the house with flowers, and invites a local reverend and his wife for a visit. Mrs. Appleyard is determined to present “the perfect picture of a fashionable boarding school at the height of [its] prosperity.” Even as Mrs. Appleyard tries to present a front of normalcy, however, the girls are made to feel like a “spectacle” on any public outings, subjected to the points and stares of their neighbors. Aware that her methods aren’t working, Mrs. Appleyard tightens her reins once again, disciplining the girls harder than ever before.

Other developments at the college have upset Mrs. Appleyard—Mademoiselle (the last remaining “social asset on the staff”) has tendered her resignation on account of her impending marriage, and letters pour in every day from concerned parents who are pulling their girls out of school. Worst of all, Irma’s father has written a curt telegram declaring that his daughter is “UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES” permitted to return to Appleyard College again. The headmistress knows that Irma—an heiress who will soon be worth half a million dollars—is a devastating loss for her school’s reputation.

On top of it all, many boarders have fallen behind on fees due to their parents’ hesitation to pay tuition. One of these students is Sara Waybourne. One morning, Mrs. Appleyard summons Sara to her office and tells her that her guardian hasn’t paid her tuition. She asks when Sara’s last letter from the man came, and Sara says it was around Christmas, when he asked permission for Sara to stay at school over the holidays. Mrs. Appleyard says she remembers the “inconvenient” request. Mrs. Appleyard tells Sara that because there’s no money for supplies, she won’t be permitted to continue in art classes—and if payment isn’t received soon, Mrs. Appleyard will look into “other arrangements” for Sara’s education.

Elsewhere at the college, the visiting art teacher Mrs. Valange arrives for her classes. She makes small talk with Tom, who tells her that he and Minnie are getting married—they’re giving Mrs. Appleyard notice of their departure at Easter. Neither of them, he says, enjoy working at the college anymore. Mrs. Valange says she knows what he means—in Melbourne, people are saying “horrible” things about the school. Spotting Sara—her favorite pupil—looking sad, she asks the girl what the matter is. Sara tells Mrs. Valange what Mrs. Appleyard has just said, and Mrs. Valange, incensed, goes straight to Mrs. Appleyard’s office. After the meeting, Mrs. Valange summons Tom to drive her back to the station.

When Mrs. Appleyard is unable to achieve the results she wants by being nice, kind, and relaxed, she reverts to repression, constriction, and control—and ups the intensity on all fronts. Mrs. Appleyard is infuriated by all the negative public attention the school is getting, and if she can’t control what’s being said in the press, she’s going to attempt to control what’s being said (and done) within the walls of the college itself.



Mrs. Appleyard becomes more and more anxious as she realizes that her school is falling each day in terms of its social and academic reputation. The headmistress wants to populate her staff and student body with wealthy, popular, attractive people—and squirms under pressure as she realizes she may not be able to do so for much longer, given all the disastrous happenings and bad press.



Mrs. Appleyard is, again, viewing Sara as a kind of symbol representing her own ability to control her circumstances. Sara is incorrigible and unchangeable—and Mrs. Appleyard treats her with increasing threats and cruelty in an attempt to make Sara fall in line, and become compliant even when it comes to matters poor Sara herself can’t directly control.



This passage shows just how profoundly the gossip and negative publicity surrounding the school has infiltrated the college’s environment, affected its own staff’s relationships to the place, and impacted the ways in which students and staff now relate to one another.



On the drive, Mrs. Valange writes a note to Sara and tucks it into an envelope. She gives Tom a little money to deliver it, and Tom obliges—he likes both Sara and Mrs. Valange. The next morning, however, Tom is distracted by an errand, and forgets about the letter entirely. He doesn't come across it until weeks later—he and Minnie read it aloud and find that in it, Mrs. Valange offered Sara to come live with her in Melbourne should her guardian not come to collect her by Good Friday.

The other girls blame Sara for Mrs. Valange's departure after hearing rumors that the row between the art teacher and the headmistress was over Sara's treatment. Sara becomes sad and withdrawn. Her glumness both irritates and disturbs one of the governesses, Miss Lumley, who writes to her brother Reg expressing her desire to leave the school and take up another position.

Sara spends much of her time alone in the room she once shared with Miranda. None of Miranda's things have been moved since her disappearance—everything has been left in its right place. Sara misses Miranda and wishes she would come back. As Sara lies awake in the dark that night, unable to sleep, she can hear possums squealing and grunting “obscenely” on the roof.

CHAPTER 10

The narrator writes that the “spreading pattern” which has taken hold of the lives of those involved both intimately and distantly with the events of the picnic at **Hanging Rock** is “still fanning out in depth and intensity”—the pattern is not yet complete.

At Lake View, Mike and Irma's recoveries are progressing well. Mike is nearly back to his old self, and while Irma still has no memory of what happened to her on the **rock**, she's awake and well enough for basic questioning. Doctor McKenzie doesn't believe Irma will ever recover her memories of Saint Valentine's Day—her mind, he says, is like a clock that has stopped.

The following Saturday, Mademoiselle arrives at Lake View to visit Irma. Though the newspapers have been swarming with rumors about Irma, Mademoiselle has paid none of it any mind. The two share a tender, happy embrace—but don't speak of the shared heaviness on their hearts, knowing no words will ever be sufficient. Mademoiselle shares the news of her engagement and teases Irma about whether she has met Mrs. Fitzhubert's “handsome” nephew yet. Irma deflects Mademoiselle's playful taunts, but Mademoiselle insists Irma will know her beloved the instant she sees him. The second she laid eyes on her own fiancé, she says, she knew he was the one.

The letter from Mrs. Valange offering to take Sara in could have changed the girl's life. Because of fate or chance, the letter never gets to her, and Sara's life begins heading down a very different—and much darker—path than it might have had she gotten the letter from Mrs. Valange.



Sara cannot catch a break, no matter what she does. She is ostracized by her teachers and peers alike, and her one ally at Appleyard College is dismissed for trying to stick up for her. Sara is truly alone in the world—and a decidedly vulnerable target.



This passage demonstrates Sara's intense loneliness—and also provides a macabre bit of foreshadowing about Sara's future, which will soon take a turn for the grotesque and bizarre.



This brief passage suggests that the events that have transpired at Hanging Rock will continue to influence the lives of those connected to the incident for a long time to come.

Just as Mr. Hussey's watch stopped at the base of the rock while Mike lost track of time wandering its peaks, the recurring motif of a clock or watch appears here again to describe Irma's bizarre lack of memories of what happened to her on the rock.



Mademoiselle and Irma can now meet on different terms—not as student and pupil, but as friends and survivors of a terrible incident which has bonded them, they believe, for life. Mademoiselle talks to Irma as she would talk to a friend, teasing her but also providing her with valuable advice about her current situation.



Mike is recovering well and spending more and more time out of doors. His aunt tries to entice him with visits from eligible bachelorettes, but Mike has no interest in the English transplants his family wants to fix him up with. One evening, after a visit with a particularly boring suitor, Mike takes a walk down by the lake. He believes he sees Miranda down at the water's edge, but as he runs toward her, sees that he has mistaken a swan for her slender visage. The swan flies away over the lake.

One afternoon, upon his aunt's suggestion, Mike asks Albert to help him arrange a visit to meet with Irma. Though she's been staying at another wing of the estate, they haven't had a meeting or conversation since their return from **Hanging Rock**. As Mike approaches her lodgings, he wonders what the two of them could possibly have to talk about—but as soon as he lays eyes on her, he is smitten by her "sweet serious face." Though Mike expects her to be simple and quiet like all great beauties he's met, Irma is chatty and pleasant.

Before long, the elephant in the room comes up—**Hanging Rock**, and the Appleyard girls' ill-fated picnic. Irma insists she's glad the conversation has shifted toward Hanging Rock—she's been looking forward to thanking Mike for continuing the search that led to her rescue. Mike insists that Albert was the one who really found her. Irma says that though she's heard Albert's name frequently lately, she doesn't know who he is. She asks to meet him, and Mike promises to arrange a visit.

That night, Mike goes out to the stables to find Albert. Albert welcomes Mike warmly and says how nice it is to see him up on his "pins" again. Albert jokes about the unsightly "pins" of the girl who called upon Mike this afternoon, and Mike laughs. Mike tells Albert that Irma wants to meet him—Albert, however, is loath to meet Irma, uncertain of what he'd say to the wealthy and beautiful heiress. Nevertheless, Mike tells Albert to meet him and Irma at the boathouse the following afternoon.

At the appointed time, Mike and Irma wait together at the boathouse. Albert tries to hurry by them pushing a wheelbarrow, but Irma stops him to introduce herself and to thank him for his part in saving her. Albert shakes Irma's hand but insists that Mike is the one who really rescued her. Irma points out how modest both men are. After a brief conversation, Albert excuses himself and continues with his duties. Though their interaction lasted only a few moments, over the years, the narrator reveals, Albert will come to think of their conversation as a sprawling and acrobatic one that lasted the entirety of the afternoon.

Mike's aunt wants to take advantage of his new status as a quasi-hero to set him up with eligible bachelorettes and advance their family's social standing. Mike, however, is haunted by the thought of what could have been had Miranda been recovered from the rock.



Mike's aunt's suggestion that Mike visit with Irma seems innocent enough at first, born out of a desire to help the two young, traumatized people connect over their similar experiences. Later in the novel, though, Lindsay will expose Mrs. Fitzhubert's suggestion as a bald grab at Irma's fortune and social clout by setting her up with Mike.



Mike has been petrified of bringing up Hanging Rock around Irma, fearing her reaction—but it turns out that Irma is insulated against her memories of the rock and eager for the chance to thank those responsible for saving her for doing their part.



Mike knows that Albert keeps himself tucked away in the stables perhaps out of fear, but more likely out of simple social precedent. He wants Albert to appreciate himself more and come out of his shell, and in this scene, tries to get his friend to do just that.



This passage shows how precious and vital this period of time—and the connections made within it—will be to the characters throughout their entire lives. Though Albert is too shy and modest to even really engage with Irma, she will, in the context of his memories, become larger than life and an important part of his personal history.



That afternoon, Michael and Irma go out for a boat ride on the lake—and every day after, they enjoy daily outings in the little punt, jaunts through the gardens, and board game matches outdoors. Irma is chatty and bright, and though Mike is often quiet and demure, he comes to enjoy her company. One afternoon out on the lake at the end of the summer, Irma laments that their time together is over. Mike insists it's been good fun while it lasted. Irma states that Miranda used to tell her “everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place.” The two of them watch plaintively as a swan swims out from some reeds up ahead and takes flight.

At the end of their time together, Irma drops a hint about how she'd like for it to go on—but when she realizes that Mike has no interest in pursuing a deeper relationship, she gives up and invokes a piece of Miranda's wisdom. She does so possibly to comfort herself—or possibly to test the waters and see whether Mike truly loved her more beautiful, carefree classmate.



CHAPTER 11

Over breakfast, Mrs. Fitzhubert tells her husband the Colonel what an “ideally suited” match Mike and Irma would be. The Colonel is more concerned with his overcooked ham, but Mrs. Fitzhubert snaps at him, ordering him to pay attention—Irma is joining them for lunch later on.

This brief glimpse into the Fitzhuberts' private conversation shows that even in the midst of their great wealth, they're still scheming as to how to advance their position in society through their nephew.



At one o'clock sharp, Irma hurries down to the house for lunch. She is surprised to find that Mike is not in the drawing room but joins Mrs. Fitzhubert happily all the same. As she makes polite but stilted conversation with the Fitzhuberts—conversation in which Irma must disguise her genuine worldliness from the self-important but narrow-minded couple—she wishes Mike would join them. As the group enters the dining room and lunch begins, the Colonel wishes aloud Mike would come, too. Privately, as he notices a large emerald bracelet on Irma's wrist, he thinks to himself that Mike is squandering an opportunity to “land” Irma.

Irma must endure an unenjoyable lunch with the Fitzhuberts—a tepid and somehow crass pair who privately think of Irma only as an object which might advance their own social standing.



Irma walks along the lake back to her room, narrowly avoiding the deluge of a summer storm. Mrs. Cutler brings her a letter from Mike, which she hungrily takes and rips open as the storm, outdoors, intensifies, then passes as quickly as it came. Irma reads Michael's rather impersonal letter, in which he apologizes for missing lunch due to a meeting with a banker—and then reveals that as winter is coming and Lake View will be closed for the season, he won't see Irma to say goodbye. He tells her he's planning on traveling around the country for the next several months, beginning in Northern Queensland.

Irma's love for Mike is profound but unrequited. He can't even make a little time for her before departing on his own journey—a fact that shows just how little he prioritizes his friendship with Irma.



That night, Irma sleeps fitfully—and, the narrator reveals, so do many other characters. Mrs. Appleyard is “bloated and blotched by evil vapours,” while Sara dreams happily of Miranda, her only escape from the slights she faces at school during the day. Mike dreams of meeting Irma on a crowded train, but in the dream, he pushes her away with his umbrella. At dawn, Irma wakes. She thinks back to the day of the picnic. One of her only memories from that day is spotting Mike across the creek and realizing instantly that he was her “beloved.”

This passage shows just how many people have been affected by the events of the last few weeks—and how intensely Hanging Rock has cast a shadow over each aspect of their lives. Irma, in particular, is struggling to make sense of her life and her desires in the wake of the incident—she must live with the knowledge that while she believed their twinned involvement in the tragedy would bring her and Mike together, it has not.



CHAPTER 12

It is the afternoon of Thursday, March 19th. Appleyard College is cold and quiet—lunch has just finished, and afternoon classes have not yet begun. During a bit of leisure time, Mademoiselle reads a letter she received from Irma earlier in the week. The letter is written in Irma’s signature chatty, upbeat, flighty voice, and it reports the news that Irma is traveling to the Menzies Hotel in Melbourne to meet her parents, who are arriving from India later this week. She says she’ll be stopping by the college on Thursday to bid Mademoiselle and the other girls goodbye—but is hoping to avoid seeing Mrs. Appleyard.

Irma’s letter suggests that she has made what seems to be a full recovery and is back to being her old self. She is, nonetheless, returning to Europe, perhaps feeling that there is nothing left for her in Australia—or that the place is too wild, dangerous, and threatening for her any longer.



Just as Mademoiselle finishes reading the letter, Mr. Hussey drives Irma up to the front of the building. Before Mademoiselle can hurry down to meet her, she watches out the window as Mrs. Appleyard sweeps Irma inside and leads her straight to her office. Miss Lumley summons Mademoiselle—it is time for them to lead the girls in their gymnasium class.

Mademoiselle is genuinely looking forward to seeing Irma—and perhaps knows that Mrs. Appleyard’s only interest in seeing the girl is to manipulate and control her in an attempt to influence the narrative surrounding Appleyard College and the events at Hanging Rock.



Mrs. Appleyard, having received a letter from Irma’s father suggesting he would be bringing a Scotland Yard detective over to further investigate the disappearances, is determined to use Irma to diffuse the situation. Mrs. Appleyard asks Irma how she’s feeling and whether she’s been able to remember anything from the day up on the **rock**—Irma says she hasn’t. Mrs. Appleyard tells Irma that her parents are doing her a disservice in bringing her home before her education is complete, and further states that Irma’s teachers always complained about her “lack of application” when she was a pupil at the school. As soon as the words are out of Mrs. Appleyard’s mouth, however, she regrets having done something to “further antagonize the wealthy Leopolds.” Irma replies that the only things she learned at Appleyard were learned from Miranda.

Mrs. Appleyard wants to control Irma, because she knows that Irma—and her wealthy, influential family—have the power to steer the investigation and dictate the very future of Appleyard College. She vacillates between trying to control her own behavior in an attempt to influence Irma and losing control—threatening her goal of maintaining a peaceable and advantageous relationship with the young heiress.



Hoping to save the meeting, Mrs. Appleyard offers Irma the chance to stay overnight on her way to Melbourne. Irma says she's planning on traveling onward but would like to say goodbye to her classmates and Mademoiselle. Mrs. Appleyard tells Irma she can find them in the gymnasium. After an icy handshake, Irma leaves the room.

In the gymnasium, Irma finds Sara strapped to a board meant to correct posture while Miss Lumley and Mademoiselle lead the girls in plies timed to classical music. As Irma steps inside, Mademoiselle tells the girls to take a break so they can greet their classmate. Irma, though, finds that her classmates are not happy to see her—instead, they appear to be in a kind of trance as they look past Irma at the space behind her. Mademoiselle wonders what the girls can see that she cannot. The girls, the narrator says, are having a kind of collective flashback to the picnic at **Hanging Rock**, in which the looming shadow of the rock stretches over their picnic and becomes a “living monster” lumbering toward them.

Chaos overtakes the gymnasium. One student vomits while another begins flailing uncontrollably. Edith screams loudly. Mademoiselle tries to quiet the girls, but soon realizes she's lost control of them. Miss Lumley, seeing Mademoiselle's face, teases her for being afraid of the students, but Mademoiselle gravely asks Miss Lumley to go fetch Mrs. Appleyard. As the girls continue to laugh and sob, they swarm around Irma, grabbing at her as they scream, cackle, and cry.

Irma begins to panic as the girls encircle her. Edith pushes in closest to her and demands to know what happened to Miranda and Marion. The other girls, too, begin demanding to know what became of their classmates. Irma tells them she doesn't know. Mademoiselle pushes her way through the crowd and tries to extricate Irma from the mob. Edith shouts that Miranda and Marion and Miss McCraw are dead and rotting in a cave on **Hanging Rock**. On the edge of the crowd, a young girl named Rosamund—the only student who has not joined the mob—prays to Saint Valentine to make the girls leave Irma alone.

At that moment, Tom comes into the gymnasium. As the girls' heads turn toward him, they quiet down. Tom tells Irma that if she wants to make the Melbourne express, she needs to leave right away. The girls, as if snapped from a trance, part to let Irma head for the door. Mademoiselle, still upset, kisses Irma on the cheek and tells her they'll meet again soon. The narrator, however, reveals the two will never see one another again.

Mrs. Appleyard is desperate to regain control of her relationship with Irma and remain in the powerful young girl's good graces—but she's already destroyed that chance.



As the girls catch their first glimpse of Irma in weeks, they're not happy or touched to see her—instead, they are collectively traumatized by the memories of the looming shadow of Hanging Rock which her mere presence has come to represent. Sara being strapped to the posture board in this scene symbolizes the ways in which the girls are still being forced to repress their fears and anxieties about what happened at Hanging Rock—to disastrous effect, as this scene will soon show.



The terrifying power that overtakes the girls in this scene can be read two ways. It might be a kind of supernatural possession connected to whatever transpired at Hanging Rock—or it might simply be the girls finally unleashing the trauma, frustration, anger, and confusion they've been forced to repress since the destabilizing incident of their classmates' disappearance.



The girls' collective viciousness toward Irma seems to veer on the edge of possession. Only one student is exempt from the madness, but the rest are relentless, macabre, and cruel in their horrifying indictment of their former friend and schoolmate.



The intrusion of a male presence into the room seems to snap the girls from their trance. The mechanism of whatever seemed to be possessing them just moments ago is hazy and unknown, but it is clear that the girls are collectively traumatized by the frustrating ambiguity of the “College Mystery” which has engulfed all their lives.



After Irma leaves, Mademoiselle curtly tells the girls to go change out of their gym clothes. After the girls leave the room, Miss Lumley steps out of a cupboard where she's been hiding—she never went to fetch Mrs. Appleyard. Mademoiselle calls Miss Lumley a “little toad.” The two women hurl insults at one another until Miss Lumley threatens to tell Mrs. Appleyard about everything that has transpired. Mademoiselle lifts a large weight from the floor and says that if Miss Lumley breathes a word, she'll clobber her to death in her sleep. As the women call a truce, they hear a horrible “rasping cry” from the corner of the room—nobody remembered to unstrap Sara from the posture-correcting board.

Secrets and lies are engulfing the lives of everyone at Appleyard College as the students and staff alike struggle to make sense of the strange forces that have taken hold of their school. The poor, traumatized Sara is now, after overhearing Mademoiselle and Miss Lumley's fight, that not even the adults are in control of the strange, dark happenings seeping into more and more of daily life at the college.



CHAPTER 13

Dinner that evening is awkward and tense. Mrs. Appleyard knows nothing of what happened in the gymnasium but is dealing with problems of her own between Mr. Leopold's letter and another from Miranda's father. Desperate to keep the mood in the dining room buoyant and light, she questions the girls about Irma's visit. They reply with sullen, short answers. Mrs. Appleyard notices a sparkling emerald bracelet on Mademoiselle's wrist, but assumes the piece is faux.

Even as the entire college has sunk into the depths of misery and chaos, Mrs. Appleyard insists on keeping appearances up—and clearly, her students and staff have learned to follow her example and do the same.



After dinner, Mrs. Appleyard returns to her study to write her responses to the letters on her desk. She admires herself for not taking the easy way out by selling the college even in the face of rumors of hauntings and foul play. Mrs. Appleyard knows that in order to stave off the rumors—and thus the demise of her business—she must take decisive action. Mrs. Appleyard once again examines the ledger, stressing over finances and enrollment. She suspects that only about nine of her twenty pupils will return after Easter—much to Mrs. Appleyard's chagrin, one of the few students remaining will be Sara. She closes the ledger, writes her letters, and goes up to bed.

Mrs. Appleyard is beginning to feel backed into a corner. Gossip and scandal have rocked her professional and personal life, and she is uncertain of whether she'll be able to dig the college—her life's endeavor—out of the mess it's in, now or ever. Mrs. Appleyard continues to single out Sara as the object of her hatred—perhaps because Sara remains a presence she cannot influence or control.



The next day, Mrs. Appleyard receives a note from Bumper—one of the city detectives wants to speak with her about “discipline” tactics employed prior to the picnic. That afternoon, Mr. Hussey pulls up to the college with a passenger in his buggy—it is Reg Lumley, Miss Lumley's brother. As the pompous but shabby-looking man steps out of the coach, Mrs. Appleyard reluctantly goes out to meet him. She tells him it's an inconvenient time for him to visit, but Reg states that he received a letter from his sister yesterday which made him realize that Appleyard College is no longer a “suitable place” for her to be employed, citing the recent publicity surrounding the college. Mrs. Appleyard assures him the “mystery” will soon have a solution, but Reg insists that Miss Lumley wants to leave.

Scandal and threats of further investigations and interrogations continue to buffet Mrs. Appleyard in the form of pressure from the police and harsh, loud accusations from the pompous Reg Lumley. Mrs. Appleyard is desperate to maintain that everything is going to be all right—but those around her can tell that her façade is slipping and that her repeated reassurances are nothing but lies.



Mrs. Appleyard, in response, tells Reg that his sister is a “pink-eyed imbecile” and an “ignorant dunce” of whom she’s all too happy to be rid. An hour later, Miss Lumley, having collected her bags in a hurry, sits in Mr. Hussey’s cab with her brother on the way down the road. In the wake of her departure, the staff and students are abuzz with excitement as rumors of the argument between Mr. Lumley and Mrs. Appleyard spread.

The only student uninterested in the scandal is Sara—whose increasing pallor of late has prompted Mademoiselle to ask Mrs. Appleyard to send for Doctor McKenzie. Sunday evening, as Minnie brings Sara’s supper upstairs for her to eat in bed, she runs into Mrs. Appleyard in the hall. The headmistress herself is looking poorly, even as she asks condescendingly if there’s an “invalid” about the house. Mrs. Appleyard waves Minnie on, but tells her to inform Sara that she’s not to put her light out for the night until she’s had a word with the head.

Minnie enters Sara’s room to find her sitting up in bed looking ill. Minnie tries to put the tray on her bed, but Sara insists she won’t eat it. Minnie tells Sara she’s acting childish for a girl of 13. Sara says sometimes she feels like an old woman. Minnie insists Sara needs to have some fun, but Sara scoffs at the idea and confides in Minnie, explaining that she was brought up in an orphanage where she was abused. She begins crying. Minnie leaves the tray at her feet, suggesting she eat, but Sara shouts that she wouldn’t eat the food even if she were starving.

On the train to Melbourne, Miss Lumley tells her brother Reg all about the last several weeks at Appleyard College. She and Reg make a plan to live and work together in a new town. They stay overnight at a hotel in Melbourne—but at three in the morning, an oil lamp left burning near an open window is blown to the ground. Soon, its flames consume the entire building, killing both Reg and Miss Lumley.

CHAPTER 14

Mike, who has been away from Lake View for a week, realizes he’s left an important letter from a solicitor at his aunt and uncle’s. He returns to the estate to retrieve the letter and stay the night. After supper, he heads down to the stable to visit with Albert and have some whisky. The two men talk about how they’ve been busying themselves lately, and when Mike tells Albert he’s planning on touring Australia, Albert says he’s always dreamed of doing such a thing. Mike invites Albert to come with him. Albert says he doesn’t want to abandon his post at Lake View but could probably get someone to cover his work for the winter. Mike urges Albert to write to him once he has a plan for covering his position, letting Albert know he’s welcome to come along on the journey.

This passage shows that Mrs. Appleyard’s response to being unable to control a situation is to lash out in anger and hatred—seemingly ignoring the values of discretion and propriety that guide the rest of her life.



Even as Sara struggles with her physical and psychological wellbeing, Mrs. Appleyard continues to target and even threaten the girl. It’s clear that she believes, somehow, that in controlling Sara, she’ll be able to regain control of her own life and circumstances more largely.



This passage reveals the depths of Sara’s misery. She is hurt, angry, and traumatized—and no one around her is helping her to get any better. She appears to be on some kind of hunger strike, protesting against her treatment at Appleyard College—another reading of this passage, however, might suggest that Sara is being poisoned or drugged by someone in the college, hence her gradual decline.



The disaster which befalls Miss Lumley and her brother in this passage is yet another mysterious, catastrophic incident which may or may not be tied to the chaos seemingly unleashed at Hanging Rock.



Mike’s return to Lake View sees him reuniting with Albert—and making plans with the man as an equal and a friend. Though Albert must make arrangements that Mike doesn’t have to worry about, Mike still wants his friend to feel welcome to come along and explore the countryside. Though Australia is newly home to Mike, it is the place Albert has been born and raised—and now he has the chance to explore it on his own terms.



As Mike sips his whisky, he mentions that he's been drinking more and more at night in order to sleep—he has frequent and vivid dreams of **Hanging Rock**. Albert slaps his knee and says he, too, often has “bobbydazzler[s]” that are so real they're frightening—but he never lets them upset him. He says he often dreams of his younger sister, whom he hasn't seen since their days in an orphanage. After finishing telling Mike about his dreams, Albert asks Mike if Mike thinks he's crazy. Privately, Mike experiences a stream-of-consciousness reverie in which he believes there is more sense in believing in Albert than believing even in God, a “terrifying old man” who has arbitrarily found and saved or allowed to die all the girls lost that day on Hanging Rock.

The next morning, after breakfast, Mike picks up his suitcase and overcoat and heads down to the stable so that Albert can drive him to the station. On the way, they run into a local shop boy who hands a letter to Albert. Albert is shocked to be receiving a missive—no one writes to him. After the boy leaves and the journey carries on, Mike asks if Albert is going to open the letter. Albert admits he can only read print and asks Mike to read the letter for him. Mike is scandalized, but nonetheless agrees to read it aloud once they arrive at the station.

The letter is from Mr. Leopold. It thanks Albert for his assistance in finding and rescuing Irma. Also enclosed in the envelope is a very large check. The letter states that if Albert ever has any wish to “change [his] present employment” as a coachman and work for a large bank, he need only write and say so. Albert is so stunned that he barely notices when Mike, seeing his train arrive, shoves the letter back into Albert's hand and runs to board it.

On the way back to Lake View, Albert stops in town. He runs into Tom, who excitedly tells him the news about Miss Lumley and her brother. Albert, however, can barely focus on the lurid story. He says he needs to be getting back, but Tom asks him before he goes if he knows any place looking for the help of a married couple. Albert hurriedly says he may have a post for them at Lake View, then excuses himself and heads out—he cannot wait to get home and read the letter to himself again. Tom, meanwhile, spends the drive home envisioning a serene and beautiful cabin at Lake View that is all his and Minnie's—and, of course, that of their brood of smiling children.

Mike's mental state is clearly not great. He is haunted by what happened to him on Hanging Rock—and even more perturbed by the enduring mystery of what fate befell the girls trapped up there. Albert, too, has trauma and pain—his is more real, rawer, and more painful, and yet he has been forced, due to his social position, to repress his sadness, anger, and pain. Mike, however, gets to indulge his own sadness and uncertainty, a privilege of his class.



To Mike—a member of the wealthy and secretive upper class—letters are private, almost sacred things. Albert, however, is not so precious about such trifles. This is just another incidence of the differences in the men's upbringings and worldviews.



As Mike reads the letter aloud, it becomes clear that this small piece of the paper has the potential to change Albert's fate forever.



Albert's decision to depart from Lake View for a while makes a new vision of the future possible for the young lovers Tom and Minnie. Lindsay shows how interconnected the lives of those connected to the disappearances at Hanging Rock have become—and while the rock's spreading “pattern” has influenced many people for the worse, it's also brought people together in unexpected ways.



Albert arrives home and spends the next several hours memorizing the letter from Mr. Leopold by heart. Once he knows it well enough, he places the check in a tin can and burns the letter itself. Sitting happily in his chair, Albert decides to take a small holiday from work and join Mike on his jaunt around Australia after all. Albert borrows some paper, envelopes, and a pen from the kitchen, then sits down and writes some letters.

The first letter Albert writes is to Mr. Leopold, thanking the man for the gift—the first he has ever received in his life. He writes that he plans to buy himself a grand, tall horse with the money and let the rest sit “tite in the Bank.” He thanks the man again for the gift and wishes him a “long and prosperus” life. In a postscript, he adds that it was Mike Fitzhubert who really saved Irma’s life.

The second letter Albert writes is to Mr. Fitzhubert, giving the man his notice and recommending Tom to run the stables at Lake View. The third letter is to Mike, asking if they can meet up in the city, have a beer, and fix a date for the start of their travels.

CHAPTER 15

On the morning of Sunday, March 22nd, the girls of Appleyard College are busy as they ready themselves to go to church in Woodend. As Minnie bustles about the house to get the girls ready, she runs into Mrs. Appleyard running downstairs carrying what looks like a small basket. Mrs. Appleyard tells Minnie that Mr. Cosgrove, Sara’s guardian, is expected to come fetch her sometime this morning. Mrs. Appleyard insists that she’ll be looking out for his arrival and will let him in herself. Minnie is hesitant, but Mrs. Appleyard bribes her by offering her a bonus on her wedding day. As Minnie recounts the story to Tom that night, she will note that Mrs. Appleyard looked exceptionally pale—but Tom, able to focus only on the money, will be delighted.

After church, Mademoiselle goes to Mrs. Appleyard’s study. She presents herself at the door and says she’d like a word with the headmistress about Sara—she watches an “evil wind” cross over the woman’s face at the very mention of the girl’s name. Mrs. Appleyard coolly says that Sara left school this morning in the care of her guardian, taking only a small basket with her from her room. Mademoiselle is shocked and says that the poor Sara was too sick to be fit for a journey. Mrs. Appleyard says that Sara seemed “well enough.”

Albert is touched by the letter and amazed by the money enclosed with it—but at the same time, even as he comes into the first money he’s ever had in his life, he remains true to the ideas, values, and promises he’s formed and made throughout his life.



Albert is a humble and simple man who is gracious but modest. He doesn’t leap at the opportunity to take advantage of this new connection to Mr. Leopold—instead he wants to chart the course of his own life and live a humble existence.



Albert and Mike prepare to travel the country as friends and equals, separated no longer by the arbitrary barriers of wealth and class.



Mrs. Appleyard bribes Minnie to turn a blind eye to whatever the headmistress is cooking up—and Minnie obliges, tempted by her own desire to secure greater financial stability and freedom. Minnie has no idea what effect her actions will have on the things about to transpire at Appleyard College.



Mrs. Appleyard’s hatred of Sara seems to have mutated into something more—she is actively scared of any mention of the girl, and tries to tie up any conversation about her in a hasty, perfunctory manner.



Mrs. Appleyard coldly says that Sara will not be invited back for another term. Her guardian, she says, showed up and insisted on whisking her away then and there. Mademoiselle is shocked, noting that Mr. Cosgrove is usually kind and patient on his visits. Mademoiselle says she's sad she didn't get to help Sara pack her many things, but Mrs. Appleyard insists she helped Sara pack the essentials. She asks if Mademoiselle has anything else to say—Mademoiselle is silent. Mrs. Appleyard says she won't be coming to lunch. After Mademoiselle leaves the room, the headmistress, trembling, opens the cupboard behind the desk hurriedly—a small basket falls to the floor.

Tuesday brings a calm, relaxed, excitable atmosphere to the school. The girls busy themselves composing a farewell telegram to Irma, who is due to sail for England. Mademoiselle and Minnie, preparing for their wedding days, compare notes on their dresses and jewelry, and Mademoiselle shows Minnie the emerald bracelet Irma gave her. Later in the day, one of the maids comes to Mademoiselle and tells her that she needs help clearing out Sara and Miranda's old room. Mademoiselle follows her down the hall.

In the room, Mademoiselle finds things in “depressing disorder.” It seems as if Sara has left everything behind—indeed, even her suitcase is unpacked, a detail that Mademoiselle would find odd had Mrs. Appleyard not told her that Sara packed only the essentials in a small basket. Mademoiselle begins carefully putting Sara's things in the wardrobe in hopeful anticipation of her return next term. Mademoiselle stops short when she notices a small portrait of Miranda on the mantelpiece.

That night, Mademoiselle is troubled and cannot sleep. She keeps picturing the miniature portrait of Miranda on the mantelpiece—it was Sara's most treasured possession, and the girl even carried it in her pocket on school outings. Mademoiselle remembers spotting the bulge in Sara's pocket one day and teasing her about it—Sara begged Mademoiselle to never let the other girls know she carried it with her. Mademoiselle wonders what possibly could have happened Sunday to make Sara leave the beloved portrait behind. She wonders if Sara was sicker than she seemed, and if she's been hurried away to a hospital. Mademoiselle rises from bed, lights a candle, and writes a letter to Constable Bumpher.

Though Mrs. Appleyard maintains that Sara is safely with her caregiver, her account gives Mademoiselle pause—and, in the brief and private scene after Mademoiselle's departure, Lindsay deploys a clue which seems to speak to the fact that Mrs. Appleyard is indeed hiding something serious and sinister about Sara's own disappearance.



Just when life as usual seems to be resuming at Appleyard College, things are about to take a surprising—and disturbing—turn. The pattern which has engulfed the lives of all those connected to the mystery at Hanging Rock continues to mutate and spread.



The clues Lindsay has laid out over the last couple chapters begin to solidify—the mystery of Sara's sudden disappearance is an earthly and solvable one, unlike the disappearances at Hanging Rock. Sara is said to have packed all her things in a basket—a basket Mrs. Appleyard stole from Sara's room and hid away in her own study to make it seem like Sara is actually gone, when in reality, something far more sinister is afoot.



When Mademoiselle discovered the portrait of Miranda on the mantelpiece in Sara's room, it triggered the realization that something had gone terribly wrong. This passage shows just how well Mademoiselle knows her students and how dearly she loves them. Unlike Mrs. Appleyard she accepts her students for who they are, and seeks to learn about them on their own terms. Mademoiselle's knowledge about Sara will prove instrumental in tipping the authorities off to the fact that something terrible has befallen the poor girl.



On Wednesday, after all the girls have left for the holiday, Minnie goes up to Mrs. Appleyard's study with the mail. The headmistress tells Minnie she'll be dining downstairs this evening with the rest of the faculty and staff—privately thinking to herself that “no detail at this juncture [is] unimportant.” She must maintain a buoyant façade to keep the governesses still at school from getting suspicious.

Late that evening, Mrs. Appleyard sneaks out of her room at midnight dressed only in her nightgown—ordinarily, she never leaves her room without her corset on. She stands on the landing, listening to the ticking of a clock from downstairs. She creeps down the hall and peeks into Miranda and Sara's old room, now empty. She recalls bending over Sara's bed, listening to the girl cry out, begging not to be sent back to the orphanage. Mrs. Appleyard then heads back to bed, dreading another day of “enforced inaction.”

Thursday is an unseasonably warm day. The gardener, Mr. Whitehead, decides to take advantage of the weather and do some yardwork, perhaps watering some hydrangeas at the back of the house and planting some new flowers. As Mademoiselle packs up her room, she feels “like a bird about to be set free.” She sings to herself, and her voice floats out of her open window down to the grounds, where Mrs. Appleyard and Mr. Whitehead are discussing what flowers to plant and where. Mrs. Appleyard is having trouble focusing on the conversation—especially when Mr. Whitehead mentions Sara's love of pansies and suggests planting them to surprise her upon her return.

Tom approaches with the mail bag and presents Mrs. Appleyard with a letter. She snatches it from him and heads inside. In her study, she reads the letter, which is dated two days ago. It is from Mr. Cosgrove, Sara's guardian, and it explains his intent to come collect her from the college on Easter Saturday—several days from now. He encloses a check to cover Sara's fees, and asks for Mrs. Appleyard to make a shopping list for Sara—as she's nearly 14, he expects she'll soon need new, more sophisticated clothes.

CHAPTER 16

Constable Bumpher is shocked as he reads a letter that has arrived for him from Appleyard College—marked confidential, it is from the French teacher, Mademoiselle Dianne de Poitiers. The letter, written in beautiful English (in spite of the writer's repeated insistence of her inadequate grasp of the language,) describes Mademoiselle's fears about the situation of one Sara Waybourne.

This passage reveals that Mrs. Appleyard is desperate to retain control over the way others perceive her. She is hiding something big—whether she has killed Sara or is simply covering up the girl's accidental death is ambiguous, but what is certain is that Mrs. Appleyard needs to affect calm, peace, and normalcy now more than ever.



As Mrs. Appleyard's anxiety and guilt have increased, her level of control not just over her situation but her own appearance has weakened. This symbolizes her unraveling state of mind as she realizes that there are forces beyond her comprehension or control—and as she reckons, perhaps, with having committed (or simply covered up) a murder.



As the whole college begins preparing for the Easter holiday, Mrs. Appleyard is noticeably not in the mood for the season of rebirth. She is nervous and antsy, and still hate hearing any mention of Sara's name.



This letter makes clear the fact that wherever Sara is, she is not—as Mrs. Appleyard has claimed—with her rightful guardian. Mr. Cosgrove's entreaty to Mrs. Appleyard to take Sara clothes-shopping shows just how entirely he has entrusted Sara's care to her. He believed Mrs. Appleyard would prepare Sara for and induct her into womanhood—not berate her, minimize her, torture her, and possibly even kill her.



Mademoiselle has taken matters into her own hands and invoked the help of the law, unable to solve the mystery in front of her on her own.



Mademoiselle writes that on the morning of the 22nd, Mrs. Appleyard informed her that Sara had been taken away by her guardian—a fact which surprised Mademoiselle, who now fears that the child has “mysteriously disappeared.” Mademoiselle reveals that after asking Minnie and the cook about Sara’s departure, she has found that neither women saw Mr. Cosgrove arrive or leave with Sara. Mademoiselle further states that while cleaning Sara’s room, she discovered “certain things.” She writes that she will be leaving the college soon, but encloses her new address. She begs the constable to visit the school and make some inquiries—but not to let Mrs. Appleyard know about the letter.

The letter makes Bumpher uneasy. He questions his wife, a notorious gossip, as to whether she’s heard any rumors concerning Mrs. Appleyard lately. His wife replies that she’s heard the headmistress has a horrible temper and often flies into rages—not only that, but the headmistress apparently drinks a lot. He asks what his wife knows about the French governess, and his wife reports a story in which the woman, given too much change after cashing a check, returned the surplus amount to the busy banker who gave it to her—she is an honest, kind woman. Bolstered by these accounts, Bumpher tells his wife he’s heading out and may not be home until late.

Back at the college, Mr. Whitehead gets to work pruning and watering the hydrangea bed behind the house. He notices a terrible smell coming from the far end—when he goes over to investigate, he sees that the bush is trampled. He cuts away the broken stalks, and, within the hedge, soon finds “something that had once been a girl in a nightdress.” The girl’s head has been crushed in—still, the gardener knows from her tiny stature that the dead girl is Sara Waybourne. The gardener scrambles from the hedge and goes up to Mrs. Appleyard’s study to tell her what he’s found.

Once again, the narrative breaks. Mr. Whitehead’s statement to Constable Bumpher on Good Friday is reproduced. In his statement he describes going up to Mrs. Appleyard’s study to find her looking “awful.” He describes telling Mrs. Appleyard about what he’d found—in response, she let out a scream like a “wild animal.” After collecting herself, Mrs. Appleyard ordered Mr. Whitehead to ready a horse and buggy to take her to the police station. Mr. Whitehead did as the woman asked—and was shocked when she came downstairs with a handbag and gloves, surprised that she would think of gloves at such a time. Mr. Whitehead deposited the headmistress at the police station—she told him to head back to the college, insisting she’d get a cab back herself after speaking with the police. That, Mr. Whitehead writes, was the last time he saw her.

Mademoiselle knows that something is going on between Sara Waybourne and Mrs. Appleyard—but while she’s suspicious and concerned, she’s more focused on getting her own life on track and getting away from the college for good than hanging around to investigate. Mademoiselle has been worn down and traumatized by the things she’s witnessed the last several weeks, and perhaps simply can’t take anymore.



Though the novel has, to this point, taken a largely sardonic or sarcastic view of the ways in which scandal and gossip control human interactions, this small scene shows that rumors can often be just as useful as the truth. Constable Bumpher seems to actively rely on his wife’s gossip to inform his policework—demonstrating that the way people talk about one another is often very revealing.



The discovery of Sara Waybourne’s mutilated corpse adds yet another layer of mystery to the novel. Whether Sara took her own life or was murdered by Mrs. Appleyard, her death marks yet another scandal that stands to rock the very foundation of the college and its surrounding community.



Mr. Whitehead’s police statement paints a bizarre and incriminating portrait of Mrs. Appleyard’s response to the news of Sara’s death. Mrs. Appleyard is at once animalistically unhinged and bizarrely collected—it is clear from her response that she has been anticipating Sara’s body being found, and has formulated a plan for what must be done as soon as it is.



Another statement to Constable Bumper is reproduced. Mr. Hussey writes that on Thursday—shortly after being dropped off by Mr. Whitehead—Mrs. Appleyard came to him to ask for a cab out to **Hanging Rock** Road. She said she'd gotten some bad news from friends who lived there and needed to see them. Mr. Hussey offered to take the woman himself. As the rock came into view, Mrs. Appleyard made a terrible face and shook her fist at it. At a small farm, Mrs. Appleyard asked Mr. Hussey to let her out. She assured him her friends would bring her back later. He let her out. Later, in court, the narrator reveals, the shepherd and his wife who owned the farm would state that they saw a woman getting out at their gate, then walking toward the Picnic Grounds.

The narration switches to Mrs. Appleyard's point of view. Despite never having visited **Hanging Rock**, she is, from the press coverage of her students' disappearances, all too familiar with the layout of the grounds. After navigating the picnic grounds, she crosses the creek and sets off up the mountain. Though Mrs. Appleyard knows nothing of nature, she climbs the mountain adeptly, pausing only to remove her gloves. As she climbs higher and higher, she thinks of the missing girls—and of Sara.

As Mrs. Appleyard ascends, she finds herself face-to-face with a pile of stones upon which is a large black spider. Mrs. Appleyard, fearful of spiders, looks about for something with which to kill it. When she turns around, she finds herself looking at Sara Waybourne staring at her from behind “a mask of rotting flesh.” Mrs. Appleyard takes a running jump toward a nearby precipice and leaps from it. She falls to the ground below, impaling her head upon a sharp, jutting rock.

CHAPTER 17

A clipping from a Melbourne newspaper dated February 14th, 1913, is reproduced. The article commemorates the 13th anniversary of the disappearances at **Hanging Rock**. After the “mysterious death” of the college's headmistress several months after the incident, the college was destroyed in a bushfire the following summer. In 1903, rabbit hunters uncovered the only clue ever found—a scrap of fabric thought to be part of Miss McCraw's petticoat. The article also states that Edith Horton—a girl who accompanied the missing students up the rock but returned to the picnic grounds—recently died. The article states that the only missing student to return, Irma Leopold, has married well and is now a countess. In the years since her return, she has never recalled any more details of her time up on the rock. The “College Mystery,” the newspaper says, is likely to remain unsolved forever.

Mrs. Appleyard continues to manipulate and deceive as she makes her way to Hanging Rock. Even though she seems to despise the rock, judging by her unhinged and terrifying reaction to laying eyes on it for the first time, this passage makes it clear that she is determined—or compelled—to make it out to the rock and up to its peaks to confront the source of her own misery.



Mrs. Appleyard's visit to Hanging Rock is both surprising and fated. Though she has ignored the pull of nature—and a reckoning with her own guilt—for a long time now, this passage shows that even the controlled and controlling Mrs. Appleyard is being forced to surrender to the very forces which have upended her life.



As the specter of Sara Waybourne appears to Mrs. Appleyard, the image—whether it's real or imagined—seems to solidify her guilt. Unwilling to live with that guilt and fear any longer, she decides to take her own life—or offer herself as a sacrifice to the rock, which she perceives as a vengeful and bloodthirsty entity.



The final chapter of the book—which reads as a kind of epilogue or postscript—offers little or no resolution as to the monumental, devastating events that have defined the novel's final chapters. Lindsay uses this brief chapter to demonstrate the long, unending half-life of gossip and scandal, and also to suggest that the answer to such a great mystery is not what's important, but rather the casualties and failures of human decency which erupt in the wake of something so divisive and incomprehensible.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tanner, Alexandra. "Picnic at Hanging Rock." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 16 Dec 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tanner, Alexandra. "Picnic at Hanging Rock." LitCharts LLC, December 16, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020.
<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/picnic-at-hanging-rock>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Picnic at Hanging Rock* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Lindsay, Joan. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Penguin. 1967.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Lindsay, Joan. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. New York: Penguin. 1967.