

## Teacher's notes

## The Beach

by Alex Garland



## SUMMARY

**T**he *Beach* by Alex Garland tells the story of Richard, a young backpacker from England who goes to Thailand looking for adventure. At a guesthouse in Bangkok he finds a map pinned to his door. It has been put there by the man in the next room who kept him awake the previous night talking incoherently about a beach. The man has now killed himself. The map shows the way to a secret beach on an island in a National Park in the Gulf of Thailand where tourists are forbidden to go. Together with a French couple, Étienne and Françoise, Richard finds the beach and the small community of travellers, led by a woman called Sal, who have gone there in search of a place unspoiled by tourism. They soon make friends with the others and settle down to life in paradise. Each has a role to play in the life of the community and their existence seems idyllic. However, tensions develop within the group and things start to go wrong. As events spiral out of control, the community's inability to cope with a real crisis is revealed. First there is an outbreak of food poisoning. Then a fishing party is attacked by a shark, Sten is killed and his friends Christo and Karl are left in need of medical help. The community is divided over what to do. Some want to take Christo and Karl to a doctor and return Sten's body to the mainland so his parents can be told what has happened. Others want to bury Sten to preserve the secret of the beach and they turn a blind eye to Christo and Karl's need for help. Richard, meanwhile, is haunted by the knowledge that he may already have endangered the secret of the beach. In a moment of rashness before leaving Ko Samui, he had given a copy of his map to two Americans, Zeph and Sammy, and he lives in fear that they will come after him and he will get into trouble with the community for betraying their secret. A further problem is that the travellers share the island with drug dealers who are growing fields of marijuana. The fields are guarded by armed men. The drug dealers are prepared to tolerate a limited number of travellers on the island, but when Zeph and Sammy and three Germans finally arrive on a raft carrying Richard's map, the drug dealers feel their secret business is threatened and they kill them. Richard sees the rafters being beaten by the guards and he hears the gunfire as they are killed. When Sal suggests to Richard that he kill Karl to help protect the beach and restore tranquility to the community, he is shocked and he refuses. Nevertheless, he is capable of killing and he expresses no remorse at the death of the rafters. He, Keaty, Étienne and Françoise make the decision to leave the beach secretly in the middle of a festival when everyone will be too stoned to notice. Jed agrees to leave with them, but not until the fatally injured Christo is dead. When Jed is asleep, Richard kills Christo.

Richard and the others put drugs in the food and prepare to escape. However, the drug dealers invade the festival, bringing the dead bodies of the rafters. They warn that they will not tolerate the secret of the beach being revealed to other people and they produce Richard's map. Angered by the fact that they have brought this threat to their community, some people start to attack the dead bodies and mutilate them. Then Sal picks up the map and finds a note from Richard to Zeph and Sammy on the back. They then turn on Richard and start attacking him with knives. He is rescued by Jed, Keaty, Étienne and Françoise.

In the final chapter of the book, Richard is back home and he reveals a few details of how he and the others escaped and how he feels now looking back.

## ABOUT ALEX GARLAND

Alex Garland was born in London in 1970. After leaving school, he spent six months in Southeast Asia, and he has returned there many times since, most frequently to the Philippines. He graduated in history of art from Manchester University in England and began his career as an artist and freelance journalist. *The Beach*, his first novel, was written in 1996 and soon became an international bestseller, with five million copies sold worldwide. In 1997 it won the Betty Trask prize for the best first novel by a writer under 35. Garland's second novel, *The Tesseract*, was published in 1999.

In 1999 *The Beach* was made into a successful film starring Leonardo di Caprio as Richard and Virginie Ledoyen as Françoise.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

In recent years, increasing affluence and a taste for travel have encouraged many young people of all nationalities to take time off between school and university or between university and full-time employment to explore the world. Many of them end up in Thailand, a country famous for its beautiful unspoiled beaches and exotic lifestyle, where living is relatively cheap. Travellers and backpackers can meet there, share experiences and discover a world quite different from that in which they have been brought up. Free from the restraints of home, young people find it an exciting place to try new experiences and enjoy themselves to the full. Like Richard, Étienne and Françoise, they are in search of adventure and for some, typical tourist activities such as river-rafting and trekking no longer offer enough excitement to satisfy them. Furthermore, the popularity of Thailand as a holiday destination has meant that the beaches have become crowded and the resorts touristy. The community of the beach are trying to find a paradise that has not been spoiled by commercialisation.

Although laws against drugs are strict in Thailand, drugs, particularly marijuana (dope), are relatively cheap and easy to obtain. Smoking dope is part of daily life in the Beach community and there is a ready supply because drug-dealers are using the isolated island to cultivate fields of marijuana plants. Neither the dealers nor the community can reveal the other's secret to the authorities without getting into serious trouble themselves, so they are able to exist in an uneasy tolerance of each other. However, the arrival of yet more travellers, this time bearing a map, is too much for the dealers to take and they murder them and bring the mutilated bodies to the camp to act as a warning to the others.

*The Beach* has been compared to *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding (winner of the Nobel prize for Literature in 1983) which tells the story of a party of schoolboys stranded on an island after their plane is shot down during a war. In this novel, too, a community is formed and at first all seems idyllic until divisions start to occur. Both books portray a society isolated from the rest of the world which starts to disintegrate under pressure, leading to a descent into primitive tribalism, characterised by violence and a struggle for power. In *Lord of the Flies*, the boys kill two of their number and are engaged in a wild hunt to kill a third when they are rescued from the island. This is echoed in the festival at the end of *The Beach* when the travellers mutilate the dead bodies of the rafters and turn on Richard. Both books suggest that civilisation is a fairly thin veneer and that without the constraints of organised society, humans tend to descend into barbarity.

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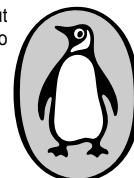
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## Teacher's notes

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers, but with the exception of pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- Write these words and phrases on the board:  
traveller Thailand secret beach drugs  
community fish escape guns help  
Ask students to work in groups and to try to guess what happens in the story. If any students already know the story, they shouldn't tell the other members of their group. They can say *warm* if the guesses of the others are close to the truth or *cold* if they are not.
- Tell students that this book is about a group of young people who have found a beautiful beach on an isolated island in the Gulf of Thailand. They are not supposed to be there, but they are tired of touristy resorts and have started their own community, living in secret in this fantastic place. Put students into small groups and ask them to imagine they are part of this community. How long would they like to stay there? How would they find food? What skills do they have which would help the community? What problems would they have? How would they prevent other people from finding out about the beach? Groups report back to the class.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Chapters 1–2

In pairs, students write the interview between Richard and the policeman. They then act it out for the class.

## Chapters 3–4

- Students read Richard's description on page 18 again and draw a sketch of the beach as seen from the top of the waterfall.
- In groups, students write as many sentences as they can giving information about the following characters. They then read them out to the class and see which group has the most information.  
Sal Mr Duck Bugs

## Chapters 5–6

- In pairs, students discuss the following:  
Imagine you live at the beach. What things would you miss from 'the World'? Richard and Jed are about to do a Rice Run. What things would you ask them to bring back for you?
- In small groups, students make a list of the things that have started to go wrong for the people at the beach. They then decide which are potentially the most dangerous and put them in order.

## Chapters 7–8

Chapter 8 is called 'Paradise to Hell'. In groups, students discuss in what ways paradise has changed to hell for Richard and the others.

## Chapters 9–10

In small groups, students choose a scene from these chapters and act it out.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- In pairs, students discuss the character of Richard. Is he the sort of person they would like to have as a friend? What do they think about his actions in the book? Was he right to kill Christo?
- In small groups, students discuss the following question:  
Which of these sentences do you most agree with? Give reasons.
  - Richard is glad that he had an exciting adventure in Thailand and would probably like to go travelling again.
  - Richard knows that he is lucky to have escaped with his life and now regrets going in search of adventure.

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. Most of them are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Chapters 1–2

**backpacker** (n) a traveller whose luggage is carried in a bag on their back  
**bitch** (n) an offensive word for a woman you dislike  
**coconut** (n) a large brown nut with white flesh, which is filled with a liquid  
**cool** (adj) a word used about something or someone you like or admire  
**coral** (n) a hard substance formed from the bones of very small sea animals  
**dope** (n) an illegal drug, especially marijuana  
**gulf** (n) a large area of sea partly surrounded by land  
**idyllic** (adj) very pleasant and peaceful  
**joint** (n) a cigarette that contains marijuana  
**lagoon** (n) an area of sea water that is separated from the sea by sand  
**paradise** (n) a place or situation that you like very much or that is very beautiful  
**resort** (n) a place where a lot of people go for a holiday  
**stoned** (adj) very relaxed or excited after taking an illegal drug  
**suntan** (n) when your skin goes brown from being in the sun

## Chapters 3–4

**chest** (n) the front part of your body between your neck and stomach  
**clearing** (n) a small area in a forest where there are no trees  
**cliff** (n) a high steep rock or piece of land  
**deserted** (adj) empty and quiet because people have gone away  
**longhouse** (n) a large building where many people can live and sleep  
**mask** (n) something that covers all or part of your face in order to protect it

## Chapters 5–6

**moan** (n) a long low sound made by someone who is in pain or very unhappy  
**panic** (v) to feel so frightened that you do things without thinking clearly  
**squid** (n) a sea creature with a long soft body and ten tentacles  
**vomit** (n) the food or drink that comes out of your mouth when you are sick

## Chapters 7–8

**smash** (n) a violent hit  
**trauma** (n) the shock caused by an unpleasant and upsetting experience

## Chapters 9–10

**ferment** (v) if fruit is fermented, the sugar in it turns to alcohol



## Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only exercises are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

- Look at the picture on the front of the book.
  - Who are the people in the picture?
  - Where are they and what are they doing?
- Individually or in pairs, read the Introduction at the front of the book. Then answer the following questions.
  - What is the difference between a tourist and a traveller?
  - The beach is described as 'paradise on earth' and 'heaven on earth'. What sort of place do you imagine 'paradise' and 'heaven' to be?
  - What do you think could go wrong to turn paradise into hell?

### Activities while reading the book

#### Chapters 1–2

- Put the following events in the order in which they happened.
  - Richard met Zeph and Sammy.
  - Richard, Étienne and Françoise went to Ko Samui.
  - Mr Duck killed himself.
  - Richard was woken up by the man in the next room.
  - Richard was interviewed by the police.
  - Mr Duck pinned a map to Richard's door.
  - Richard showed the map to Étienne and Françoise.
  - Étienne and Françoise arrived in Thailand.

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- Richard arrived in Bangkok.
- Richard gave a copy of his map to Zeph and Sammy.
- The man in the next room gave Richard a joint.
- Étienne and Françoise went river rafting in Chiang Mai.

#### Chapters 3–4

- The following sentences are false. Correct them and say what you know about each situation.
  - They put their backpacks in plastic bags to carry them across to the other island.
  - As soon as they had swum across to the other island, they set off in search of the special beach.
  - The dope plants were growing naturally on the island.
  - The men they saw in the dope fields looked friendly.
  - To get down to the beach they had to climb down the waterfall.
  - Richard felt comfortable and at home as soon as he reached the camp.
- What do you think about the community at the beach so far? Would you like to live there? Why or why not?

#### Chapters 5 & 6

- Make a list of the people who have appeared in the story so far. What do you know about each of them?
- Choose the right answer.
  - Why is Jed angry when he comes back from buying the rice?
    - Because Richard has fallen

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## Student's activities

asleep on the beach and they are now late.

- (ii) Because Richard did not go with him to help buy the rice.
  - (iii) Because he has found out that Richard gave Zeph and Sammy a map showing the beach.
- (b) Why does Sal move Richard from fishing to working with Jed?
- (i) Because she knows he is responsible for Zeph and Sammy trying to find them.
  - (ii) Because Keaty wants to move from gardening to fishing.
  - (iii) Because Richard is no good at fishing and has never caught any.
- 3 Chapter 6 is called 'Disaster Strikes'. What are the three disasters in this chapter?

## Chapters 7–8

- 1 Match the names of the people to these sentences.
- Richard Étienne Christo Jed Sten
- (a) This person has been killed by a shark.
  - (b) This person has been badly injured by a shark.
  - (c) This person thinks they should let Sten's parents know what has happened.
  - (d) This person looks after his badly-injured friend.
  - (e) This person has a fight with Karl.
- 2 Do you think Richard feels responsible for the deaths of the rafters? Find evidence in Chapter 8 to support your opinion. What could Richard have done to prevent their deaths?

## Chapters 9–10

- 1 Complete these sentences.
- (a) If Richard hadn't killed Christo, Jed wouldn't ...
  - (b) If Karl hadn't escaped with the boat, Richard might have ...
  - (c) If the others hadn't rescued him, Richard ...
  - (d) If Sal had found out about their plans to escape, she ...
  - (e) If Richard hadn't given Zeph and Sammy a map, the dope guards ...
- 2 In pairs, discuss what you think Richard means when he says 'I carry a lot of scars'.

## Activities after reading the book

In small groups, discuss these questions.

- (a) How has Richard's experience at the beach changed him?
- (b) Do you think he has become a better person or a worse person?
- (c) What things has he done that he may regret?
- (d) Why do you think Daffy Duck left the beach and killed himself?

