

WEAVING

TOGETHER



LAY MALONEY

TEACHERS RESOURCES

Weaving Us Together

LAY MALONEY

Teachers Resources by Cara Shipp

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INTRODUCTION

'Your friends are really something else.'
'They're really deadly girls aye?' (p. 227)

A sharp and insightful coming-of-age story about all the ways we find home from an exciting debut author and 2022 black&write! Fellow.

When I look back, I realise everything I needed was there all along.

I'm Jean O'Ryan and this is my story. I didn't know who I was or where I belonged when I moved with my dad to a little town surrounded by hills. In that valley where the rivers meet the sea, Seraphina Landry found me fallen over on a road. With a hand from Seraphina and the rest of The Crew, we weave our lives together using threads of hope, grief, joy and love. Never alone, I find my mob, face the worst of days, search for answers and figure out what kind of person I wanna be.

A sharp and funny Australian YA about a non-binary Aboriginal person as they transverse the ups and downs of life, including finding their family, healing from trauma and figuring out who they are.

From Gumbaynggirr and Gunggandji writer and black&write! Fellowship winner Lay Maloney.

'A story that will grab your heart with both hands. Poetic, hilarious and heartbreaking in turn, this book is a gift for Blak kids and young readers everywhere' Grace Lucas-Pennington, black&write!

Author Lay Maloney is a young genderfluid storyteller of the Gumbaynggirr and Gunggandji nations and South Sea Islander heritage based on Dunghutti Country. After university, Lay worked at the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition. They did not choose to be a writer – writing chose them. Their first commission was in 2020 for *More Than Melanin* zine. Their poetry has been published in *NANGAMAY MANA DJURALI*, and in 2022, they were the recipient of the State Library of Queensland's black&write! Writing Fellowship for their debut novel, *Weaving Us Together*. They were the Emerging Producer for the 2024 Blak & Bright festival in Naarm, before moving back to Country, where they continue to write fiction and poetry. They tend to only leave their hobbit hole for the essentials: family, friends, adventure and the sea.

Highly recommended for teens 12+, with some themes that are more suitable to Years 10–12.

CULTURAL NOTES

Most government education departments in each state have some guidelines and protocols for teachers working with First Nations students and classroom content. Here is a good example from the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority:

<https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/about/k-12-policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-perspectives/protocols>

You can also find information about culturally sensitive teaching on the 'Miss Shipp' blog:

<https://missshipp.wordpress.com/five-foundations-of-first-nations-focussed-teaching/>

Ideally, a First Nations text and topic should be discussed in conjunction with some community connection: meeting and working with local First Nations Elders and cultural leaders, going out on Country with rangers and local custodians, learning about your local place and its culture and history. Further suggestions for how to do this within the context of studying this particular text are included in the notes.

THEMES AND CURRICULUM LINKS

Themes in this book include:

- Celebration of the different types of love in relationships – platonic, familial, romantic – and the security these relationships can bring as well as the complexity and dysfunction people can experience in these relationships.
- Home, connection and belonging – the different ways people connect to place through people and culture.
- Connection to Country, First Nations identities, histories and cultures.
- Exploring LGBTQIA+ experiences, sexual and gender identity, coming out, dealing with discrimination.
- Dealing with grief.
- Mental health and how to support loved ones and oneself when facing depression and anxiety.

The curriculum links for this book are outlined below. It fits well in the Year 10 curriculum, allowing exploration of relationships, identities, communities, responsibilities to Country and cultural expression through art.

Year level	Curriculum area
Year 10	<p>English Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC9E10LA01 understand how language can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people • AC9E10LA03 analyse text structures and language features and evaluate their effectiveness in achieving their purpose <p>English Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC9E10LE01 analyse representations of individuals, groups and places and evaluate how they reflect their context in literary texts by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors • AC9E10LE02 reflect on and extend others' interpretations of and responses to literature • AC9E10LE03 analyse how the aesthetic qualities associated with text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features, and the context in which these texts are experienced, influence audience response • AC9E10LE04 evaluate the social, moral or ethical positions represented in literature • AC9E10LE05 analyse how text structure, language features, literary devices and intertextual connections shape interpretations of texts • AC9E10LE06 compare and evaluate how "voice" as a literary device is used in different types of texts, such as poetry, novels and film, to evoke emotional responses <p>English Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC9E10LY01 analyse and evaluate how people, places, events and concepts are represented in texts and reflect contexts • AC9E10LY05 integrate comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring, questioning and inferring to analyse and interpret complex and abstract ideas • AC9E10LY06 plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts, organising, expanding and developing ideas through experimenting with text structures, language features, literary devices and multimodal features for specific purposes and audiences in ways that may be imaginative, reflective, informative, persuasive, analytical and/or critical <p>HASS Geography</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC9HG10K03 First Nations Australians' approaches to custodial responsibility and environmental management in different regions of Australia

	<p>HASS History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AC9HH10K13 the continuing efforts to create change in the civil rights and freedoms in Australia, for First Nations Australians, migrants and women <p>Health and Physical Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AC9HP10P01 analyse factors that shape identities and evaluate how individuals influence the identities of others ● AC9HP10P02 refine, evaluate and adapt strategies for managing changes and transitions ● AC9HP10P03 investigate how gender equality and challenging assumptions about gender can prevent violence and abuse in relationships ● AC9HP10P04 evaluate the influence of respect, empathy, power and coercion on establishing and maintaining respectful relationships ● AC9HP10P05 propose strategies and actions individuals and groups can implement to challenge biases, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, and promote inclusion in their communities ● AC9HP10P07 examine how strategies, such as communicating choices, seeking, giving and denying consent, and expressing opinions and needs can support the development of respectful relationships, including sexual relationships <p>The Arts Visual Arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AC9AVA10E01 investigate the ways that artists across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts develop personal expression in their visual arts practice to represent, communicate and/or challenge ideas, perspectives and/or meaning ● AC9AVA10E02 investigate the ways that First Nations Australian artists celebrate and challenge multiple perspectives of Australian identity through their artworks and visual arts practice
Year 11	<p>English Unit 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● explaining how texts are created in and for different contexts (ACEEN001) ● analysing how language choices are made for different purposes and in different contexts using appropriate metalanguage; for example, personification, voice-over, flashback, salience (ACEEN002) ● explaining the ways language features, text structures and conventions communicate ideas and points of view (ACEEN004) ● explaining the ways text structures, language features and stylistic choices are used in different types of texts (ACEEN005) ● analysing how vocabulary, idiom and rhetoric are used for different purposes and contexts (ACEEN006) ● evaluating the impact of description and imagery, including figurative language, and still and moving images in digital and multimodal texts. (ACEEN007) ● using appropriate form, content, style and tone for different purposes and audiences in real and imagined contexts (ACEEN011) ● drawing on a range of technologies in, for example, research, communication and representation of ideas (ACEEN012) ● combining visual, spoken and written elements where appropriate (ACEEN013) ● using evidence-based argument (ACEEN014) ● using appropriate quotation and referencing protocols (ACEEN015) ● using strategies for planning, drafting, editing and proofreading (ACEEN016) ● using accurate spelling, punctuation, syntax and metalanguage. (ACEEN017) ● analysing textual evidence to assess the purpose and context of texts (ACEEN018) ● questioning responses to texts (ACEEN019) ● investigating the impact and uses of imaginative, interpretive and persuasive texts. (ACEEN020)

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES

CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES

SENSITIVITY

Weaving us Together is a highly engaging text that supports young readers to learn about and understand a range of different perspectives reflecting the diversity of our communities. It provides an authentic voice that many First Nations readers can relate to, particularly those who may be LGBTQIA+ and exploring their identities. Teachers should be aware that there are some references to smoking, marijuana and alcohol use, sex scenes and some very coarse language. It also refers to the Stolen Generations and Aboriginal deaths in custody. Schools will need to develop their own policy and process around managing these references in a way that is appropriate to their context, including communicating with parents and caregivers about the use of the text. Nevertheless, this text is accessible and thoughtfully written, dealing with its themes sensitively, and suitable for study in a Year 10–12 classroom.

For tips about how to manage a text with the above references, and managing First Nations literature in a culturally sensitive way, see the “Miss Shipp” blog post: [Culturally sensitive teaching](#).

For further information about teaching texts with sensitive themes, see the VATE Village Podcast: [Teaching Sensitive Texts with Nirvana Watkins](#).

Context consideration: consider any of your students who may not experience the love, friendship and family connection shown in the book. Also consider students who may be triggered by the references to domestic violence, neglect and substance abuse; suicide, depression and anxiety; and Stolen Generations. Do you need to undertake any specific preparation with them/their families/caseworkers before reading the book? Or will you need to monitor their responses and ensure school support is around them? Be guided by any relevant case notes, support plans and your school administration/guidance counsellors.

FRONTLOADING

Steven Oliver’s spoken word performance ‘[Real](#)’ is a great introduction to the complex topic of identity and belonging, especially in relation to First Nations people. Oliver is a well-known Bundjalung and Kuku Yalanji writer, comedian, actor and singer. You can find a template for setting up a [yarning circle](#) on the Miss Shipp Blog, Bringing Aboriginal Perspectives into English Education.

Further frontloading discussion prompts around LGBTQIA+ and Stolen Generations themes are included in the weaving activity below. If teachers are unable to arrange the weaving activity, the discussion prompts could be used in class in yarning circle discussions.

WEAVING AS AN IMPORTANT CULTURAL PRACTICE

As part of frontloading the text, seek to engage local First Nations businesses to learn about weaving. Try looking on Supply Nation, a directory for certified First Nations businesses, and also ask your local Aboriginal centre, Aboriginal land council, or Indigenous ranger group. Ideally, rather than an incursion, an excursion to learn about local sites and plants while also learning weaving would help to connect your students to the local landscape and the whole practice of weaving: from selecting the plants at the right time/season, to preparing them (boiling/dyeing/drying), to weaving, deepening students’ understanding of how weaving connects to Country and culture.

If you are unable to engage with a local First Nations business about weaving, you may be able to arrange online workshops with a business such as:

- [Ngumpie Weaving](#)
- [Culture on the Move](#)

You can also listen to (or read the transcript) and discuss the SBS Podcast 'Australia Explained' by Melissa Campagnoni, [What is the cultural significance of First Nations weaving?](#), 13 February, 2024. It broadly outlines how weaving can bring people together, inspire conversation and connection, be a way of passing down heritage and knowledge, and have utility (making rope for hunting, baskets, nets). In many First Nations cultures it is not a gendered activity, with both men and women learning the practice.

Students can also learn weaving online from First Nations practitioners:

- Indigenous Digital Excellence (IDX) [Virtual Gathering – Indigenous Weaving Workshop](#), 31 May 2020 – includes preliminary information about types of plants and techniques for preparing plant materials.
- [Weaving Workshops](#) filmed by NSW Government for NAIDOC Week, 9 November, 2020, published in The Rocks YouTube gallery – includes information about weaving practices all over the world.
- [Weaving on Country](#) filmed by University of New England, 26 October, 2020 – includes great information about preparing grasses for weaving and about the importance of the yarning circle, but there is less technical teaching about how to weave.

If possible, have students take a weaving project they've started with their First Nations mentors back to the classroom to complete. Follow up with yarning circles while weaving to discuss the themes and preview the book. It would be a good idea to set up protocols for your circle discussions first (ways to share opinions respectfully, ways to decline from comment or have time out if the topic is confronting). It would also be a good idea to have trusted learning support, wellbeing staff and First Nations education workers present too. Ideally, the discussions could be in a safe wellbeing space in the school, or outside in a yarning circle/bush garden location. Consider the following conversation prompts:

- One of the themes in this book is the importance of friendship. For teenagers, this is a time in life when your friends become more important to you and provide more support for a lot of your life experiences. Teens are often starting a new popular culture and language that represents their generation, making it harder for adults and teens to communicate. The characters Jean and Seraphina sum it up well in this quote:
"...or whatever the adults say.
They talk a lot of shit.
What even is interest on a loan?
Or heterosexuality.
Or gender?!" (p. 294)
Do you agree? Are friendships more important or central to you than your relationships with adults right now? Is this a good thing? What roles do teens need adults to take in their lives as they grow up?
- Another theme in this book is that a person can call more than one place home, and can feel a strong connection to more than one place.
 - What are your thoughts about this?
 - How many of you have lived in more than one place in your life?
 - How do you feel about moving house?
 - Where are your favourite places or places you feel really comfortable and at home?
- In the book, we have a range of characters from diverse cultural, gender and religious backgrounds: Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, gay, lesbian, transgender, non-binary, Christian. They each have specific experiences and understandings connected to their identity and culture that is unique to them. This is a mirror of our diverse contemporary society. How can we best co-exist and get along?
 - What can be done in our communities to make everyone feel understood and respected?
 - Should the Australian government introduce stricter anti-discrimination laws, education and training across public institutions to address racism and homophobia? Should there be better training of teachers and school staff to address these issues in schools?
 - When Seraphina comes out to her devoutly Christian nan, Nan takes time to respond and is angry/upset at first. But she knows she loves her granddaughter and doesn't

want to lose her, so she says, “Bub, I’m happy for you. I don’t know anything about this homosexuality, but I will try for you.” (p. 279) What do you think about this idea of trying to get to know and understand a person’s perspective/experience? What tips would you give to Nan about how to go about this?

- The book’s main character, Jean, begins the novel not really knowing their Aboriginal heritage. Their father had been taken from his family at birth and placed in a boys’ home. What do you already know/have you heard about the practice of removing First Nations children from their families, from the beginning of Government ‘[Protection Acts](#)’ to remove children in the 1880s through to now? Can you imagine what the impacts would be on the child removed? On their family?
 - See [The Healing Foundation](#)’s schools resource kit, with tips on how to set up discussions and lesson plans about the Stolen Generations for different year levels.
 - For a short video stimulus, see this SBS News article about Sorry Day, [National Sorry Day marked across Australia, 28 years after landmark report](#), 26 May 2025.

By discussing these ideas while weaving, students can be invited to start considering, processing and presenting their thoughts about the themes of the book in a non-judgemental and safe context. From these initial discussions, teachers will have a good gauge to how the class will respond to the novel and what gaps may need to be addressed in knowledge and understanding. Teachers can also refer back to these initial discussions after reading the novel, to see if students now understand more and have changed or adapted their viewpoints.

CLASSROOM IDEAS: ENGLISH

DURING READING

Private student journal

- Students should be set up with a journal that is separate from their class exercise book/notes (either online or physical). Explain to students that the journal is for them and will not be marked or read by you. They will, however, from time to time be invited to take a journal entry and polish it to be submitted as a writing piece in response to the novel.

Class work journal

- Have students set up a double-entry journal in their class book or online. This is separate to their private journal and will be read by you. Direct students to use this for chapters that are not ‘focus chapters’ with activities in this teachers’ guide.
- In the journal, divide the page in half. On the left side, students write quotes from the book or dot points about the plot that stand out to them for each chapter. On the right side, students write their response, opinion, thoughts and questions about the chosen quote/plot point.
- After every 2–3 chapters they read, students pair up and compare their notes, adding anything they find interesting from the discussion to their double-entry journal. They then highlight the additions made after each pair-share and submit the double-entry journal for marking/teacher review.

FOCUS CHAPTERS

Chapter 1

Read chapter one together and then spend time discussing students’ initial impressions of Jean and their father. Key quotes and discussion points:

- “His lips hadn’t tilted with joy in months”, p. 1, describing Dad

- “Where did I belong?”, p. 1, Jean’s quest
- Practising kick flips – “It was hard – which is why I wanted to do it”, p. 5, Jean’s personality
- “Her smile held the world at arm’s length”, p. 6, initial impression of Seraphina
- We don’t find out the main character/narrator’s name until page 8 – did anyone assume Jean was a boy? What does this help us understand about gender stereotypes?
- “We were both walking without direction”, p. 8, Dad’s and Jean’s experience so far around identity and belonging
- Have students write a journal entry in their private journals to sum up their thoughts about this chapter and the class discussion.

Chapters 2–3

At end of Chapter 3, we have had some glimpses of the main adults and families in the novel:

- Jean and their dad – beautiful and poignant scene on page 17 where Jean takes their feelings out on him. At the end of the chapter, they apologise but find it hard to express why they behaved that way. Dad talks about depression, and they change the subject – they can’t respond straight away, need some processing time.
- Seraphina and her mum, Aunty Rosy – Seraphina knows they don’t live conventionally, but she is protective of her mum and creates her own safe space in her bedroom, pp. 12–13.
- Uncle Mickey is a key figure, trusted by Dad and engaging/connects with the kids – someone they can trust to support, the fun teacher but also someone they listen to: “he spoke every word with weight”, p. 16.

In their private journals, invite students to make text-to-self connections with any character or scene from this section, with prompts such as:

- Write about a fight you’ve had with your family. Fictionalise and dramatise it and create the scene in the style of the tense dinner scene in the book.
- Write about a favourite teacher or trusted uncle/aunty/family friend – what do they do to make you feel like you can talk, be yourself, have fun? Describe them, describe things they say and their mannerisms.
- Thinking about the scene where Jean’s dad brings up depression and they can’t think about it straight away but google it later, write a checklist of all the reasons a teenager might change or avoid a subject in conversation with parents. As an extension, provide advice to parents about how to best bring up these topics and what to do if their teen ‘shuts down’.

Chapter 4–5:

In these chapters we learn about the personalities of the friends in “The Crew”.

- Have students create a grid and outline key traits/appearance/habits/quotes about each character, noting page numbers for reference.
- Invite students to create a character list representing their own core friendship group or family group (siblings/cousins). They can create playing cards, or profiles with avatars, using Canva or other drawing/animation applications – encourage creativity. Consider also each person’s “love language”, as Ariel likes to make loom bands for everyone and makes them matching red, black and yellow bands (p. 25).
- Have a class discussion with students about their developmental stage as teens and how in this stage, friendships become more important in many ways than their family. They begin to rely more on friends for information and advice. As Jean says, the Crew had no secrets, and Jean could tell them more than they told their dad as they understood better (p, 29).
- Invite students to write an expository response to the class discussion about friendships over family: should we accept that friendships take precedence over family relationships during the teenage years? Is this normal, healthy, safe? What should family do in response? What role can family still play?
- Have students write a journal entry in their private journals to sum up their thoughts about these chapters and the class discussion.

Chapter 6:

This chapter includes a key scene in the book – the fight at school that Jean was involved in, leading to their and their friend’s suspension for one week.

- Discuss “the Crew’s” involvement in the fight and actions during it. Were they justified? Can violence be justified? What could they have done instead? What would students in your class do in that situation?
- Discuss Jean’s dad’s response – giving them the “silent treatment” and leaving sticky notes around to remind them of chores and what they weren’t allowed to do (e.g. a note on the television, ‘NOT FOR JEAN’, p. 32). Jean says that “Principal Harper’s heated scolding was nothing compared to dad’s icy disappointment” (p. 31). Discuss possible reasons for his response and seek students’ opinions on whether they feel this is a fair response or not.
- Jean is branded a troublemaker and it is only their behaviour that is seen. The bullying behaviour that led to their retaliation isn’t considered. Ask students, is this a common problem with schools and parents/authority figures? What would they recommend schools do differently?
- Jean does not bother to explain to the school why they fought, feeling they wouldn’t be understood. Invite students to write a journal entry in their private journals about whether they have ever been in this position and why they didn’t speak up. Would they do something differently now or in future?

Chapters 18–20

This is a significant section as it is when Jean’s father is reconnected with his family and returns home to Country. The elation Jean feels about finally knowing their heritage and being able to tell their friends is soon replaced by guilt and conflict over whether they should agree to moving back there. While they enjoy meeting family and learning their culture and history, they don’t want to leave their friendships and life in Reidville, which is their connection to their mother.

Jean and Dad talk about what “home” means, and how you can feel connected to more than one place.

- Have students list plot points and key quotes under the following headings, using the question prompts to guide them.

Family relationships <i>Who are the family members Jean meets, describe their personalities/roles in the family.</i>	Connection to Country and culture <i>What does Jean learn about their Country? What cultural knowledge do they learn and talk about with their new family? What reflections are shared about connection to Country?</i>	History <i>What do Jean and their dad learn about the family’s history and how he was taken away?</i>

- Refer back to the frontloading discussions about Stolen Generations, specifically the questions, resources and stimulus. If you did not cover this in your frontloading lessons, explore these now.
 - See [The Healing Foundation](#)'s schools resource kit, with tips on how to set up discussions and lesson plans about the Stolen Generations for different year levels.
 - For a short video stimulus, see the SBS News article about Sorry Day, [National Sorry Day marked across Australia, 28 years after landmark report](#), 26 May 2025.
 - Ask students: can you imagine what the impacts would be on the child removed? On their family?
 - If you have already completed the above as frontloading activities, ask students, after reading chapters 18–20: have your thoughts changed since the start of the novel? Do you feel you have a deeper understanding? Does Jean and their dad's story help you to better understand and feel empathy for Stolen Generations victims? Can you see what is meant by "intergenerational trauma", when you think about Jean's dad's depression and its potential impact on Jean?
- Have students write a journal entry in their private journals to sum up their thoughts about these chapters and the class discussions.

Chapters 58–60

In these chapters, the death of Jean's cousin Antony in police custody forces them to stop and spend time with their community on Country, bringing them closer and strengthening their identity, belonging and connection to culture. Points of discussion include:

- Jean begins to internalise their cultural responsibilities: "Nothing could be said. So I was there. I listened. I watched. I learned about my family." (p. 286)
- Jean realises the value of their old people, listening to Nan's repeated stories: "One day she wouldn't be here and I didn't wanna regret not listening." (p. 290)
- In Jean's dreams, their totem, the bilby, is eaten by a brown snake, and then they see a brown snake crossing the road when out driving through town. (pp. 288-9) They are hearing and feeling messages from the ancestors and their Dreaming stories, and possibly communication from Antony. The imagery of ropes reminds us about the symbolism and cultural significance of weaving, and how cultural objects made from the land such as woven mats, art, baskets and ropes do not only have utility but connect families in relationship. Jean is connecting more deeply with family, Country and their cultural heritage.
- Jean learns more about their family history, their nan and pop, life on the mission and why a social worker recommended Jean's dad be removed from the family and made a ward of the state (p. 290). Further information about missions in QLD can be found on the QLD State Library website, ['Community History'](#) page.
- Jean learns about how to be part of their community: they meet the mother of Antony's unborn baby; join in with family to chase away the Chief of Police from attending Antony's funeral, throwing rocks at him; and participate in a vigil setting up camp outside the police station to campaign for justice (pp. 285–287).
- Jean sees the empty 'relationship' between the police and their community: from when Antony was harassed for simply sitting outside a shop in chapter 35 to now being detained for a minor offence that others may get away with, resulting in a death in police care that has been explained as an accident, with no independent inquiry/investigation or even discussion with the family. Further exploration on Aboriginal deaths in custody is outlined under 'Classroom ideas in humanities and social sciences' in these teachers' notes.
- The history of government control and its failure to adequately care for and protect the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people can be seen in Jean's family history, the intervention of the social worker who removed their dad, and Antony's death in custody.
- For further exploration of the issues of child welfare and incarceration, view and discuss the TedX talk "[A state is not a parent: why the child welfare system fails](#)" by Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, 16 December, 2023. Vanessa is a proud Bundjalung, Widabul, Wiabul woman from mid-North

Coast, NSW, who experienced removal from her family at age 11. She studied law and social work at university, is a human rights advocate and winner of the Australian Human Rights Medal, 2019, and at 26 she became the ACT Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.

- Have students write a journal entry in their private journals to sum up their thoughts about youth justice and child protection/welfare, especially considering the link between the two systems.

AFTER READING

ACTIVITY: Students can map the development of Jean and Seraphina's relationship in an illustrated timeline using sketches or animations and key quotes. Key references include:

- Ch 9 when Jean hesitated about kissing her after 'practice kissing' with Lulu
- Ch 30 when they woke up embracing and Jean finds a hickey on Seraphina's neck
- Ch 32 when Jean wrestles with the truth of being in love with Seraphina
- Ch 39, as tension builds between them
- Ch 50–51 when they finally get together and tell their friends

ACTIVITY: Students can create a poster summarising the instances of racism experienced in the novel. Students should explain why each example is wrong and suggest more appropriate things people could do or say instead.

- Jayden's ignorance about Jean's identity
- The art gallery ladies' conversation and treatment of Seraphina
- The Halloween incident where a neighbour called them monkeys and chased them away
- Felicity's family wanting to 'claim' Aboriginality with Seraphina's help

ACTIVITY: Divide the class into different 'theme' groups. Have each group collect and annotate quotes to do with their allocated theme, explaining how the theme is developed and what messages are conveyed. Each group presents their work to the class and a class quote bank is created of all the key quotes and notes for each theme. This can then be used as a study support in a summative assessment such as exam or essay task.

- The different types of love in relationships – platonic, familial, romantic (especially see Chapter 40).
- The importance of friendship in teen development. There are some tender moments where we see the Crew's real love and admiration for each other, and they support each other through some very confronting and challenging times (Ch 5, end of Ch 16, Ch 19, Ch 27, Ch 43–44).
- Connection to Country, First Nations identities, histories and cultures (especially Ch 19, 31, 35, 60).
- Exploring LGBTQIA+ experiences, coming out, dealing with discrimination (especially see Ch 42–44, 47, 48, 50, 53, 56–7).
- Mental health: depression and anxiety come and go in Jean's and their dad's lives, in between everyday life and other events, just like in real life. Ch 28, 45–46 in particular explore Jean's deteriorating state.

ACTIVITY: Students can create a playlist/booklist of all the songs and books referred to in the novel. Have students look up each book or song/artist and annotate the list with explanations of their meaning, connection to the novel and characters, and/or why they are important to Aboriginal or LGBTQIA+ people.

ACTIVITY: Have students collect quotes to compare Lulu's, Seraphina's and Jean's relationships with their mothers (see p. 40, pp. 55–6, Chapters 21, 24, 25, 27 and 54–55). Invite students to consider some of society's stereotypes and assumptions:

- Are you 'lacking' in your childhood development if you grow up with an absent or deceased parent?
- Is it better to be with your parent and be affected by their mental health or substance abuse than it is to be without your parent?
- Can we assume that a parent with substance abuse issues is neglecting their child or is unfit to parent?
- What does a child need in order to develop in a healthy way?

LITERARY DEVICES AND WRITER'S STYLE

- Descriptive language:
 - Description of place and landscape, p. 7, p. 11, pp. 153–4, p. 165, p. 168
 - Description of people, p. 10–11
 - Description of feelings: p. 145, p. 206, p. 233
- Figurative language:
 - “Like seeing a fish walk on land” (p. 53)
 - “Mixed feelings curled in my gut like a hungry tapeworm” (p. 116)
 - “All the words piled up in my throat and squeezed it shut” (p. 118)
 - “Her voice was like yellow box honey” (p. 139)
 - “I’d miss her like an amputated limb” (p. 140)
 - Imagery – fighting the monster in their mind (p. 147)
 - “Like a dandelion blown into the wind” (p. 257)
- Humour, flippancy, to diffuse tension or disrupt a ‘deep’ emotional moment:
 - p.134 – wondering if people have washed their hands before sharing the holy water at church during a funeral
 - p. 192 – Jean swears at Antony as he teases them after a deep discussion about Country
 - p. 214 – Dad’s incorrect birth certificate – “always felt like a Pisces anyway”
 - p. 295 – “adults talk a lot of shit”

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Students can be invited to select an entry from their private journal that they are comfortable to share. They can edit, polish and add to it and submit it as an original response to the text. Provide a guide for whether to write an expository or narrative text:

- If they choose a journal entry where they have written about themselves (a time when they got in trouble, a time they’ve had a fight with a family member or a favourite teacher memory), they can create a narrative and present either a poem, short story or anecdote writing in their own voice.
- If they choose to reflect on the First Nations characters and themes, or real-life issues such as deaths in custody, students can create an expository text such as a letter to government, essay, or information text outlining the issues and recommendations for solutions, based on research.

Note: students should be discouraged from creating a narrative and writing a story from a First Nations character’s point of view unless they are First Nations and using their own voice. This is best practice to honour First Nations sovereignty over their own stories and representation in literature, which has not always been respected.

CLASSROOM IDEAS: HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

ACTIVITY: INDIGENOUS APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Totems are a traditional way in which First Nations people look after Country. Review other contemporary approaches by viewing, comparing and discussing these videos highlighting Indigenous ranger work by the not-for-profit company, Country Needs People.

Ngurrpa Indigenous Protected Area

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNAY05mhuDE>

Karajarri Indigenous Protected Area – The Sawfish Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4gaOQA7Wa0>

Marine Turtle and Dugong Monitoring

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIQSyacwWiM>

If possible, arrange an excursion to work with local Indigenous rangers and experience a day working on conservation projects. Back in the classroom, discuss what a difference it would make in young First Nations peoples' lives if they could be involved in more of this kind of learning and employment. What opportunities and benefits could this offer for people like Antony, Jean, Seraphina, Ariel, Lulu and Iris? How would this benefit all Australians?

ACTIVITY: RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Antony's death in custody (after being detained by police for a minor infringement that many others would not be detained for) represents one of the biggest issues in First Nations' fight to assert their human rights.

- See the digital classroom lesson by the National Museum of Australia about the [1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#) and its review in 2020 in the Black Lives Matter movement.
- Read about, view and discuss, the [Living Black](#) episode exposing abuse and neglect of Aboriginal youth in custody, from June, 2025, "Cyrus was told to drink from his cell toilet. His experiences in the NT Youth Justice system aren't isolated".
- Read and discuss the SBS online article, 26 June, 2025: "[Lowest point we've been: minister behind Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody slams inaction](#)" (by Emma Kellaway, NITV).
- If possible, arrange a guest speaker from a local Aboriginal legal service or local police Aboriginal community liaison officer to find out more about the issue and find out what action can be taken.
- Invite students to write a letter to local MP, Federal MP or other relevant government body to outline what they have learned about the issue, their concerns, and call for action.

CLASSROOM IDEAS: HEALTH AND PE

The characters in the novel deal with the following experiences as they navigate growing up through their teenage years:

- Depression and anxiety
- Exploring gender issues, non-binary identity, gay and lesbian relationships
- Romantic relationships, sex and pregnancy
- Impacts of racism

In small groups, select one of the above topics and outline the examples of what the characters experience in the book. Then review support services available online to help young people with the issue you are discussing. What are some of the key recommendations for young people facing this issue? What advice and resources do you think would be most effective? Each small group will then present to the rest of the class their issue, the case study/example of the issue from the novel, and the support resources they recommend from their review.

Below are some samples of online support services and resources.

Deadly Story – LGBTQIA Services and Organisations directory

https://deadlystory.com/page/identity/LGBTQIA/Services_Organisations

Young Deadly Free education resources

<https://youngdeadlyfree.org.au/resources-3/>

Young Deadly Free unit outline on healthy relationships

https://youngdeadlyfree.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ydf-healthy-relationships_unit-outline.pdf

13Yarn web resources

<https://www.13yarn.org.au/factsheets>

ReachOut web resources

<https://au.reachout.com/>

Headspace

<https://headspace.org.au/>

CLASSROOM IDEAS: ART

If possible, work with local First Nations artists to learn about their weaving practices.

Learn about the Tjanpi Desert Weavers. View an exhibition online or locally if accessible. Complete their online weaving tutorial:

<https://tjanpi.com.au/pages/weaving-tutorial>

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