

Teachers' Notes

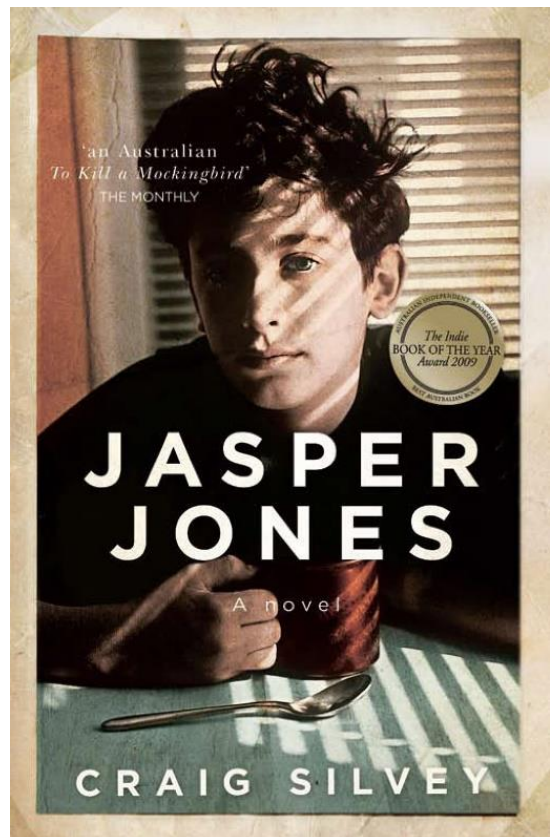
Jasper Jones by Craig Silvey

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Recommended for ages 16 yrs and older

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INTRODUCTION

Late on a hot summer night in the tail end of 1965, Charlie Bucktin, a precocious and bookish boy of thirteen, is startled by an urgent knock on the window of his sleep-out. His visitor is Jasper Jones, an outcast in the regional mining town of Corrigan. Rebellious, mixed-race and solitary, Jasper is a distant figure of danger and intrigue for Charlie. So when Jasper begs for his help, Charlie eagerly steals into the night by his side, terribly afraid but desperate to impress.

Jasper takes him through town and to his secret glade in the bush, and it's here that Charlie bears witness to Jasper's horrible discovery. With his secret like a brick in his belly, Charlie is pushed and pulled by a town closing in on itself in fear and suspicion as he locks horns with his tempestuous mother; falls nervously in love; and battles to keep a lid on his zealous best friend, Jeffrey Lu.

And in vainly attempting to restore the parts that have been shaken loose, Charlie learns to discern the truth from the myth, and why white lies creep like a curse. In the simmering summer where everything changes, Charlie learns why the truth of things is so hard to know, and even harder to hold in his heart.

CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

Jasper Jones is best studied in secondary years (grades 9 to 12), and can be used to teach to all three strands of the Australian English curriculum (Language, Literature, and Literacy). Its literary style and historical setting make it an excellent choice for interdisciplinary English/Humanities units, or English units in which historical context is emphasised.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

CHARACTERS

Charlie Bucktin

"That's why I need your help. Because you're smart, and you're different to the others, and I thought you'd understand, for sure." p.28

"That's what you do, right? When you're readin. You're seeing what it's like for other people." p.29

I'm deathly afraid of them. Bees. Wasps. Hornets. Anything that flies or crawls or hops or stings. p.87

I bruise like a peach. And I'm afraid of insects. And I don't know how to fight. p.92

- What does Jasper see in Charlie? Why do you think he was drawn to him in this crisis?
- Charlie describes himself as a coward. How fair do you think this is? He is afraid of insects, bullies, and seeming like a fool in front of Eliza. Do these things make him a coward?
- As the protagonist of the novel, we see the story unfold through Charlie's eyes. Everything that happens is framed by his reactions, perceptions, judgements, decisions, and fears. But is the story really about him? Why/ why not?

Jasper Jones

... there is no break in this for him, there's no comfort, nowhere he can go and lie down and be looked after. p.51

"I haven't ever felt like a kid, Charlie. you don't unnerstand. I bin lookin after myself since I can remember. And that's food, clothes, where I sleep, the whole lot." p.183

The lost boy who has lost everything. p.356

His mother is dead and his father is no good. p.6

Jasper Jones. An orphan, or as good as. Whose dad hits the drink as hard as he hits his only son. Who also has to steal to eat. I can't even begin to imagine what has happened under that roof. p.107

- Do you think Jasper turns to Charlie for help because he sees him as a marginalized person in their town, like himself? Or does Jasper simply see that Charlie exhibits the qualities that Jasper needs in order to work out what to do?
- Are the boys bound together by being, to some degree, fellow outcasts? Or, does sharing these experiences bind them together?
- Does being 'different' help to develop empathy in a person? Are there benefits to being on the outside, looking in? What are the negative effects on a person of being marginalized?
- We know that Jasper is identified by the town as Aboriginal but he is relatively disconnected from his Aboriginality, from the truth about his mother's death and her heritage. What do you think Jasper's cultural identity is? Is he a boy without a home and therefore without country?
- At the end of the novel, Jasper is depicted as '*falling out of the world...they'll never find him. He's too smart and too fast for them. He's too clever and canny.*' (p. 394) Is Charlie romanticising Jasper's independence and rootlessness? How do you think Jasper will fare as an 'outlaw'?
- What does Jasper's story tell us about the place Aboriginal people have in colonised Australia? Do you think much has changed since the 1960s? Why/ why not?
- Jasper was abused by the police when they pulled him in for questioning. This has been the experience of an enormous number of Aboriginal people. Investigate this issue and discuss the social implications of this problem throughout Australia's history. Useful places to start:
 - The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in custody
 - These visual resources: <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-incarceration-in-australia-at-a-glance-57821>
 - The SBS timeline of the Royal Commission: <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2016/04/14/royal-commission-aboriginal-deaths-custody-timeline>

Jeffrey Lu

I think Jeffrey might well be my proudest literary creation. – Craig Silvey

Jeffrey Lu, my best and only friend, who is younger and smaller and, if I'm honest, smarter than me...Jeffrey is unflappable. He has a smile that you can't wipe or slap or goad off his face. p.9

I don't especially dislike cricket, but it requires some special sort of pathology to give it the kind of devotion that Jeffrey shows. p.65

But Jeffrey Lu is uncanny... Jeffrey can manage to be intimidating. He's not so affable with the pads on and the bat in hand. He's like an animal, aggressive and focused. Or some kind of sword-wielding hero. You can't put the ball anywhere when his eye is in. p.66

Maybe he's bravest out of all of us. p.92

Jeffrey Lu has taken this game by the nuts. In this frightened town, Jeffrey Lu, its shortest, slightest occupant, is fearless. p.238

In a way, he's more assured than any of those vindictive bastards with peach pits in their pockets. p.9

- Charlie often describes Jeffrey as 'brave'. What is it about Jeffrey that makes Charlie see him this way? What kind of bravery does he display?
- What do you think attracts Charlie to Jeffrey? Discuss the nature of their friendship.
- What makes Jeffrey able to withstand the racist bullying he receives?
- Imagine Charlie was not present for the cricket game. Write a creative piece from Jeffrey's perspective recounting the tale of his victory. Use other conversations between these two characters to inform the way Jeffrey tells the story.

Eliza Wishart

She tried to carve out a little space for herself, a little vacuum away from the world. p.331

"I killed her, Charlie. It's like if you just watch someone drown from the shore without swimming out to help them. That's what I did. It's my fault." p.347

I'm watching Eliza Wishart walk and I'm transfixed, she's so assured and demure at the same time. p.81

- For the majority of the novel, Eliza exists as a remote object of desire for Charlie. Discuss as a class whether she is a character or a plot device.
- Why is Eliza so distrustful? Why does she need 'a little vacuum away from the world'?
- Was Eliza justified in concealing the truth and avoiding the police? Did her mother's reaction to the situation at home shape Eliza's reaction?
- Imagine Eliza kept a diary. As a creative piece, write several entries in this diary, showing her perspective on key events, and her feelings surrounding them. You may want to include:
 - Watching Laura sneak out regularly to meet Jasper
 - The events on the night of Laura's death
 - Her feelings after that night, especially in regards to the letter, and to what she believes Jasper's role to have been
 - Her feelings about Charlie, and his role in disposing of Laura's body

Laura Wishart

NOTE: Discussing and investigating the kind of violence that Laura endured may be triggering for students, so approach these issues with caution, and ensure students have support and resources to deal with any personal reactions that may emerge.

That it isn't Laura Wishart anymore. It's an empty bag. A wax doll. A sloughed shell. p.16

We seem to be willfully ignoring Laura Wishart. Hanged. Hanging. Just metres away. If we don't look, if we talk around her, she'll dissolve into the night. p.24

She's a gossamer ghost. She's not real. p.28

... she falls. Fast. Like a white kite spearing the ground, its tail lolling lazily behind. She folds and crumples. Like a doll. Like a bag of wet bones. With a soft, horrible thud when she meets the earth. A sound that reminds me that she's just loose meat. p.33

"I've taught Laura for a couple of years now. She's a quiet girl. Very smart. Very independent. But as I told these people today, there's something about her that seems troubled and volatile. It's as though she holds you at a distance, so I don't know her as well as I know some of my other students. But hiking on out of here on her own sounds like something she might try to do." p.139

She was rotten inside. Something worse than disease. And she had to leave. She didn't know what else to do. She was afraid. And disgraced. p.340

Her father put those marks on her face, he put the fear and the poison in her belly. p.341

- Charlie repeats the phrase 'Laura Wishart is dead' over and over throughout the narrative. Why do you think he does so? Why has Silvey employed this degree of repetition?
- Everything we know about Laura is learned through other people. She never speaks or has an active presence in the story. How does this make you feel? What do you think it means for the story?
- Laura has been abused by her father. Violence against women is shockingly prevalent around the world, and is more likely to be perpetrated by an intimate partner, family member, or other known male. The work of Rosie Batty in Australia, and the worldwide #metoo movement have brought this issue to the fore in recent years, and more people are talking about it than ever before.
 - Why do you think this violence is so prevalent and widespread (discuss with reference to patriarchy and gender roles).
 - What do you think can be done to address this problem?
 - Further reading:
Rosie Batty https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosie_Batty
The #metoo movement: <https://metoomvmt.org/>
Our Watch, Ending violence against women and their children: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/>
- Research and prepare a speech that could be given at a rally, an assembly, or even before parliament, outlining the problem of violence against women, and what you think has to change.

Mad Jack Lionel

And I think of Mad Jack Lionel. I imagine his face as a composite of Albert Fish and assorted movie villains. p.108

Mad Jack Lionel isn't a criminal. He's probably not even mad. He's just old and sad and poor and lonely. p.308

Jack Lionel is his father's father. Jasper's grandfather. p.310

- Jack Lionel is a figure of fear amongst the children of Corrigan, but those fears turn out to be based on misunderstandings, and urban myths. How does the world of the children of Corrigan map onto their adult counterparts in this way?
- Like Boo Radley, his counterpart in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jack adds to the gothic nature of this story. In what ways does the author build him up as a gothic 'villain' or 'bogeyman'? What other gothic tropes can be found in the novel?
- When the truth of Jack's relationship to Jasper and the details of his family history become known, what effect does this have on the novel? By explaining away the gothic myth that the town's children have built around him, is the tone of the novel changed? As the novel builds to its conclusion, what other 'myths' are torn down?
- Why do you think Jack cooperates with Charlie to act out Charlie's triumph over the Warwick Trent dare? (p. 387-8) What does Jack gain by being the town's bogeyman?
- What does Jack Lionel's story tell us about the social status of the elderly, and the poor?

Ruth Bucktin

The she-devil awaiting my demise at home p.104

She clamps a hand on the back of my neck and squeezes like she's trying to dig out my vertebrae. Her nails are like razors. She hisses in my ear, 'you are a very rude boy! p.134

The Hillman sits and idles for an eternity. Then, finally, my mother emerges, laughing. It's a strange sight. p.144

"Don't provoke her." p.158

My mother [...] looked like a snake poised to strike" p.211

My mother is the most sarcastic person in the universe" p.57

- Charlie's relationship with his mother is highly antagonistic. He sees her as unreasonable, cold, and aggressive. He thinks she is more concerned with appearing to be a good person than actually being one.
 - Do you think this is a fair assessment of her character?
- What reason does Charlie give for her attitude? Do you think it is sufficient to justify her flaws?
- What role does Ruth play in Charlie's coming of age? Think about the purpose of conflict in bildungsroman narratives. Is Ruth a means of providing that to Charlie?
- Parental fall from grace is also a common feature in coming-of-age stories. Examine the scene in which Charlie discovers his mother's affair and think about what might change for each member of his family after this discovery.
- The character of Ruth foreshadows social changes that began in the 1960s, particularly with regard to the role of women in society. What were these social changes?

- Why is Ruth so depressed and angry? Is it possible to pry apart the factors stemming from her character and those caused by her social environment??
- Charlie is the narrator of the story. How does this influence the reader's perception of Ruth? Was there a point in the novel when you began to see things through Ruth's eyes, and wish that Charlie could be more understanding? Or were you 100% behind Charlie's attitude to her?

Wesley Bucktin

Why does he have to be so sensible? Why does he have to phrase things so well? He should have been a lawyer, like Atticus Finch. But he'd have to stand up for something then. p.136

He claps a hand on my shoulder and then thumbs my grubby cowlick. p.139

"See how much easier life can be if you just give in a little." p.141

- Charlie's relationship with his father is more nuanced than his relationship with his mother, and changes and develops over the course of the story. Find examples of the following feeling between these two characters:
 - Jealousy
 - Affection
 - Frustration
 - Pride
- Could Wesley have taken a different course and saved his marriage? Why do you think he behaves as he does with Ruth?
- Is Charlie's father brave or a wimp or a stoic? Does he take any risks? [See question below in Bravery and Cowardice section]. Would you be proud of him as your father? Would you love him?

Mr. Wishart

Beating Jasper at the police station: "Pissed as a rat and twice as angry. Screamin at me, spittin. Where is she? What did you do? Stinkin of turps, worse than my old man." p.179

Her father, the shire president... he visited Laura's room as well. But he didn't tap politely. He crept in, drunk. Always drunk. Always discreet. There were no locks. p.331

He wasn't even sorry. He had no love in him... he raised his hand and hit her, hard, in the face, which he'd never done. He knocked her down to shut her up. And he swung again, twice, right at the core of her, right where the trouble was. p.340

"First he just refused to admit she'd gone missing. Now it's as though he never had another daughter. He's blocked it all out. He's blocked everything out, really. Which must be easy when you're drunk all the time." p.228

- Did you expect Mr. Wishart to be the cause of Laura's death before it was revealed? If so, what indicators aroused your suspicion?
- Corrigan is just a small town. How has Mr Wishart managed to become such a powerful force in it? Jasper and Charlie know the truth about Mr Wishart; could they undermine his authority by telling another adult what they know? Why/why not?

SETTINGS

The Australian bush

I am alone in this clearing. The walls of leaves loom. They push in at me. p.35

... he lingers and looks up at the ghostly eucalypt. p.49

That huge jarrah looms big and dark. p.174

I listen to the rustles and the creaks of the bush. The walls of the glade look formidable. It makes me feel small. p.179

We slip beneath the paperbark trees which leer and lean, their scabby skins hanging from their limbs. p.321

- The landscape of this novel is instrumental in setting the mood. The bush is always close, around the edges of the town, and it is often ominous, sinister and unsettling. What are the metaphoric implications of this?
- Modern critics describe some early Australian literature as 'colonial gothic'. Like *Jasper Jones*, these stories are set outside the cities, in the space where an uneasy white settlement meets the bush. Read the short stories 'The Bush Undertaker' by Henry Lawson and 'The Chosen Vessel' by Barbara Baynton.
 - How does the depiction of the bush in these stories compare to that in *Jasper Jones*?
- Forests are often central to hero journeys and bildungsroman stories. They represent a space in which things can be wild, unexpected, and unbound by convention or rules. When a character enters a forest on a journey, they rarely come out unchanged, or unscathed.
 - Can you think of other stories where the characters go through the forest and come out changed? Think about fairy tales and other folk tales.

Corrigan (small town)

"See, everyone here's afraid of something and nuthin. This town, that's how they live, and they don't even know it. They stick to what they know, what they bin told." p.30

Corrigan: the Miners' Hall, the Sovereign Hotel, the newly refurbished post office, then the crouching loom of the police station. p.50

"With things like this, when people don't really understand what has happened, they'll assume the worst long before they have to. It's a little like when people are afraid of the dark. Often it's not the darkness they're afraid of, it's the fact that they don't know what's in it. And because they can't see, because they're not sure, they start to imagine there are more sinister things afoot than there ordinarily would be." p.140

"All I'm trying to show you is how quickly reason can be put aside once things like panic and fear start to seep in. Especially in a town like this, where people gossip like they're bloody spies." p.140

...this know-nothing town. p.95

...the whirring squeal of the kids next door swinging on their Hills hoist over a sprinkler. p.155

And so Corrigan remains a town of barnacles. A cluster of hard shells that suck themselves stuck and clench themselves shut and choose not to know about dying. p.160

I see four men destroying An Lu's garden, headlit by their own ute. p.266

Maybe that's why this town is so content to face in on itself, to keep everything so settled and smooth and serene. And at the moment, I can't say as I blame them. p.312

- Corrigan is a portrait of a typical small Australian town. From the Sovereign Hotel, to the kids swinging from Hills hoists in their backyard, it fulfils every expectation of this setting.
 - Why do you think Silvey chose such a place to set his story?
 - What might a reader expect of a place like this, and the people who live in it?
 - Do you think these expectations are fulfilled by the way the story plays out?
- The author employs a number of tropes of the gothic genre. A small rural town setting is one of them. Brainstorm some novels and films that also use this gothic trope. How does this setting add to a gothic novel?
- An Lu's garden is an oasis in this setting. He has created something beautiful and unique, that stands out from the more mundane backdrop of the town. It is a tragedy when this garden is vandalised.
 - Discuss what this scene means in the story, and what it says about Corrigan.
- Does Corrigan function as a national microcosm?

The 1960s

One of the reasons I set the book in the sixties... was that the mid-sixties were supposed to be that watershed moment where Australia truly grew up. But... maybe we really didn't. Maybe we just learned to be adult, rather than to really come of age. – Craig Silvey

- While the town of Corrigan is "turned in on itself" and geographically isolated, the wider world still influences what occurs there.
 - What wider world social changes can we see developing in the novel?
 - How do toxic ideas and attitudes persist in small communities, even as the wider society might be changing?
- Spend some time finding out about the 1960s. Divide the class into groups and give each group a different research focus. Topics may include:
 - The civil rights movement
 - The Vietnam war
 - Second wave feminism
 - The popular culture of the time (music, fashion, film)

THEMES

Truth and lies

Jasper Jones is a story dominated by lies:

- Charlie and Jasper lie about Laura
- Charlie's dad lies about writing his novel
- Jasper's family lies about their history and relationship to Mad Jack Lionel
- Charlie's mother lies to conceal her affair.

I'm not sure where to look. The water, Eliza, the glade. There are lies everywhere. p.327

I'm asking her to lie. I'm asking her to pull a blanket over parts of this story. To comb it over, to change its colour and complexion. Just so I can stay clean. So Jasper Jones can be given a reprieve. I'm asking her to keep her sister hidden. And I feel terrible. But what's right and just and true here anyway? p.361

I know the sad truth. About everything. Jasper, Laura, my mother. It's all come to light, it's all been bared, and it's bowed my shoulders so much I'm too tired to be afraid anymore. p.363

I discovered a gift for lies. I looked straight at them and offered up the best story I could muster. p.209

- Is it always wrong to lie? Organise a class debate around this question. Look not only to the novel, but to moral philosophy (e.g. Kant, St Augustine, religious texts, etc.)
Some helpful starter resources:
 - http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/lying/lying_1.shtml
 - <https://www.the-philosophy.com/kant-right-to-lie>
 - <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/the-philosophy-of-lying/3353848>
- How do lies shape the narrative of *Jasper Jones*? Choose one important lie in the story, and explore what might have happened differently had the truth been revealed instead.

War & Refugees

'Some of my family got killed... It happened yesterday. It was my ma's brother and his wife. My aunt and uncle. They won't tell me much more than that. It happened in the village that she grew up in. I don't know. I think it was a bomb.' p.151

Jeffrey explains why his mother can't go home to bury her family: "...there are bombs, Chuck. It's a war. It's pretty dangerous." p.152

The latest round of draft letters were delivered. I heard that three young men from Corrigan have been called up for National Service. p.164

I wish I'd tried to talk to my father about Vietnam. About the war there, and Jeffrey's family, and how they got killed. None of it makes any sense. I want him to explain to me just how it could happen. p.160

Strangely, of all the horrible things I've encountered and considered recently, dropping a bomb seems to be the least violent among them, even though it's clearly the worst. p.160

- As a class, research Australia's role in the Vietnam War.
 - How and why did we become involved?
 - What was 'the draft'?
 - What was the national attitude to this war, and how did this differ to how Australians felt about other conflicts like World War II.
- The war occupies a strange space in *Jasper Jones*. It occurs 'off stage' in a place that seems very distant, but it has very real consequences for the people of Corrigan.
- Discuss the concept of 'scapegoating'. How does this apply to the incident between Sue Findlay and Mrs Lu at the town meeting?
 - This scene is told from the perspective of Charlie and his father. Retell it from the perspective of one of the women directly involved. Include details about what they thought and felt.

- Recent public discourse around refugees has become contentious and inflammatory. Examine current government policy surrounding Australia's refugee policy.
 - How many refugees do we take in?
 - How many do we imprison?
 - How do we determine who deserves asylum, and who is turned away?
 - How are refugees treated in detention?
 - What happens to refugees once they are given the right to live here?
- Write a report about what you discover, using both verbal and visual modes of communication.

Racism

"I ain't protected by shit... This town, they think I'm a bloody animal. They think I belong in a cage..." p.26

"I mean, I know people have always bin afraid of me... Wary. They reckon I'm just half an animal with half a vote. That I'm no good. And I always used to think, why? They don't even know me... But then I realised, that's exactly why. That's all it is." p.30

Jeffrey failed to make the Countryweek cricket team, which came as no surprise. p.164

On the short trip home, he explained to me the cause of Sue Findlay's outburst. Some months ago her husband, Ray, had been killed in the war. They'd had a rocky marriage, but she'd taken it very badly. And only yesterday her eldest son had announced he'd been balloted through to Vietnam. She'd taken that even worse. p.171

"Sarge. The local constabulary, Charlie." p.177.[Beat Jasper up. Kept him in custody for the weekend.] *"My ribs hurt the most. Steel caps. Bloody brutal."* p.178

Jeffrey's parents are Vietnamese, so he's ruthlessly bullied and belted about by the boys at school. p.9

It's hard to understand. The folks who watch Jasper play, who barrack for him like he was one of their own, are the same ones who might cut their eyes at him should he walk their way a few hours after the game. p.79

"They just reckon it's my nature. Like I don't know any better. And you know what else, Charlie? I never once bin caught. Not even close. They all just suspect it. They expect it. Of course he's a thief, they say. Of course he burned down the post office. Of course he hanged that poor girl. That poor girl." p.45

An Lu is on the ground now. Huddled on their front lawn. And they keep going. They hit and spit on him. Swinging and kicking. I can hear them shouting: Red rat! Fucking red rat! p.266

"Jasper Jones fell out of the world and nobody noticed. Nobody cared. p.394

- Racism takes many forms in *Jasper Jones*. Subtle bias, verbal abuse, and overt physical violence.
 - Why is racism so pervasive in Corrigan? Do you think it would be the same in other places, like bigger cities?
 - Do you think things are different in the present day? Where you live?
 - What forms of racism do you see in the world around you?
- What specific assumptions do the people of Corrigan make about Jasper because he is Aboriginal? And what do they assume about the Lu family because they are Vietnamese? Where do these assumptions come from?

- How does Jasper’s Aboriginality determine the way his story plays out?
- Excelling in sport seems to be the only way Jasper, and eventually Jeffrey, gain grudging and short-lived respect.
 - What does this say about the role of sport in Australian culture?
 - Do you think the people of Corrigan are exploitative of these boys?
- Charlie feels guilty about the comforts and securities he enjoys that Jasper does not. He is becoming aware of his privilege.
 - Discuss the meaning and implications of white privilege in *Jasper Jones*, and in the wider world.
- Research what it means to be an ally. Do you think Charlie was a good ally to Jasper and Jeffrey? Why/why not? How could he have done better?
- Is Australia a racist country?
 - What is your immediate answer to this question?
 - Do some research into the statistics around this issue.
 - Find some examples of the lived experience of immigrants, refugees, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and think about their stories.
 - Has your answer to the original question changed because of your investigations?
 - Resources to start with:
 - <https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/hindi/en/article/2017/02/27/australia-racist-here-are-10-stunning-stats>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA3UsF8yyho>
 - <http://alltogethernow.org.au/racism/>

Murder, violence, and crime

I pore over the misdeeds of famous and infamous killers, fascinated by their stories. p.105

- Why does Charlie feel the compulsion to immerse himself in these stories? Do you think he finds his discoveries helpful or satisfying?
- What does this process of information-gathering mean in the context of the bildungsroman narrative?
- Charlie researches murders and violent crimes in the newspapers at the Corrigan library. As a creative piece, write the story of Laura’s disappearance as a newspaper article. You may wish to write it from the perspective of someone who doesn’t know the truth, or as it would have been told if the full story had come out.
- *Jasper Jones* opens up a space to discuss different kinds of violence, different scales, different degrees.
 - Are some worse than others? Which are most unsettling?

Bravery and cowardice

And if Jasper Jones is just as scared as the rest of us, I wonder if I’ll ever be without fear. But... maybe it’s not about being without it. Maybe it’s about how well you walk with the weight. It makes sense to me now. That’s what courage is. p.356

"For some folks, it's easier to condemn another man than have the strength to right your own wrongs." p.272

[Jeffrey is] ruthlessly bullied and belted about [at school]. But he takes it all astonishingly well, which has always eased my guilt given that I'm never brave enough to intervene. p.9

... being born without courage has proved to be a significant hindrance. p.65

Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear. p.92

I bruise like a peach. And I'm afraid of insects. And I don't know how to fight. p.92

- Charlie references his own lack of courage at several points in the novel. Do you agree with this self-assessment? In what ways is he brave, and in what ways cowardly?
- Do you agree with Charlie that real bravery cannot occur unless there is real risk? How does the theme of bravery relate to Charlie's relationship with Wes?
- Where do you fall in the Batman vs Superman debate? Divide the class into teams and debate the merits of each superhero.
- Is there a hero in *Jasper Jones*? If so, who is it?

SYMBOLISM

Peaches

To pilfer and eat a peach from the property of Mad Jack Lionel assures you instant royalty. The stone of the peach is kept as a souvenir of heroics, and is universally admired and envied. p.5

In a way, he's more assured than any of those vindictive bastards with peach pits in their pockets. p.9

There's a lumpy carpet of decaying peaches at my feet. p.385

And the peaches do feel good. I'm proud to be clutching them, because I know what it took, and it felt as though a weight had shifted as soon as I had them in my hands. p.390

- Why do you think the story is bookended by stories about the peaches?
- If peaches are a badge of childhood honour and achievement, what does it mean when Charlie finds himself standing over a windfall of rotten ones at the end of the novel?

Insects

I feel harassed by the busy sounds of insects around me, like I'm trapped in an enormous thriving hive. p.81

The strange thing is, I'm boiling over with words, they're like a swarm in my head, I just can't order them. They swirl and dip like insidious insects. Haunting and noisy and nonsensical. p.90

A fear of insects is admissible for girls. Not so for me. p.231

It feels as though I'm inhabited by a teeming metropolis of insects, trailing up and down my limbs and my neck. Burrowing under my skin. And they won't be shuddered or shucked away. p.326

Charlie is afraid of insects. He fears them in a literal way, but he also uses phrases such as 'there are insects crawling on my shoulders' (p.58) to indicate feelings of unease, anxiety and panic.

- What is it about insects that elicits this fear in Charlie? Come up with some adjectives to describe them.
- How do the sounds and movements of insects work as a literary device?
- What role do insects play in the novel's exploration of courage and fear?

GENRE AND TROPES

Bildungsroman

"I wanted to explore a lot of things with this book, but one of my primary areas of consideration was the sloughing of innocence that is growing up, that moment where the bubble is burst and you're suddenly exposed to the real truth of things and the blind trust of childhood dissolves."—Craig Silvey

A Bildungsroman is a literary genre that focuses on 'coming-of-age' stories. The protagonist moves from childhood to adulthood, innocence to wisdom, through a process of psychological and moral growth. The key feature of these stories is character change.

This shouldn't be our responsibility. It shouldn't be our hideous problem to solve. We should be able to pass this to the right people. We should be able to run like frightened kids, to point and pant and cower someplace safe. p.29

- What does the term 'coming of age' mean to you?
- Does Charlie 'come of age'? How is this demonstrated in the novel?
- Which events in the novel are instrumental to Charlie's growth? In what specific ways is he changed by each one?
- 'Coming of age' is often seen as a 'journey'. Create a graphic timeline that illustrates Charlie's journey towards wisdom.
- Do some characters in the book avoid coming of age? What does this mean on a social and community level for the people of Corrigan?
- Does 'coming of age' link to other themes within the novel, such as courage and empathy?

"Everyone ages. Everyone can learn a trade and pay taxes and have a family. But that's not growin up. It's about how you act when your shit gets shaken up, it's about how much you see around you. That's what makes a man." p.183

- What other quotations from the novel reflect the coming-of-age theme?

Gothic fiction

The term Gothic fiction refers to a style of writing that is characterized by elements of fear, horror, death, and gloom, as well as romantic elements, such as nature, individuality, and very high emotion. These emotions can include fear and suspense.

— <https://study.com/academy/lesson/gothic-fiction-definition-characteristics-authors.html> 11/8/2015.

Though *Jasper Jones* is not a gothic narrative, it deploys some tropes of the gothic genre. The projection of the narrator's psychology onto his description of people, places and events is reminiscent of the brooding and heightened sensibility of gothic tales.

- A hidden or unspoken fear is the well-spring of gothic narratives. What hidden or unspoken fears do you discern in *Jasper Jones*?
- What other gothic tropes can you find in *Jasper Jones*? [See sections above on The Australian Bush and Corrigan.]
- How useful is the gothic genre to a story which is, at least partly, about exposing social and individual fears and lies?

"I mean, I know people have always bin afraid of me ... And I always used to think, why? They don't even know me. Nobody does. It never made sense. But then I realised, that's exactly why. That's all it is." p.30

- The novel undermines the gothic trope by exposing it to the truth. Does this make it a more powerful book?
- Jasper is saying that ignorance is at the root of social fear and prejudice. Do you agree? If so, can you give other examples from the real world? Does that mean that all that is needed to change the world is education?

Eye dialect

Eye dialect is the use of nonstandard spelling for speech to draw attention to pronunciation.

"I got somethink real to be afraid of." p.26

"I know you unnerstand what I bin saying." p.29

"Hello, Chully!' she says ... 'It's no good. The test crickit is raining.'" p.60

- Why do you think Silvey uses this device?
- What might a reader assume about a character whose dialogue is presented in this way?

EXTENSION QUESTIONS

It's timing and chance, isn't it? Shit luck and good luck. You dodge bullets or you get hit. p.162

- How much of a person's life is determined by luck, and how much by character? Consider this question in terms of the life choices made by Jasper, Charlie, Jeffrey, Eliza, Ruth and Wes. As you discuss with your class, examine the points at which you disagree.

But in order to be useful to Jasper, I had to be even-handed and logical, like Atticus, like my dad. p.259

Charlie makes consistent references to *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the novel. In doing this, Silvey invites the reader to make comparisons between the two novels.

- How many character parallels can you find between the two novels?
- What themes and preoccupations do they share?
- How do they differ?
- Do you think critics like Michael Williams are justified in claiming that *Jasper Jones* is 'an Australian *To Kill a Mockingbird*'?

Why is the novel called *Jasper Jones*, and not *Charlie Bucktin*?

RELATED TEXTS

To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee, 1960

To Kill a Mockingbird, film, Robert Mulligan, 1962

Breath, Tim Winton, 2008

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain, 1884

Great Expectations, Charles Dickens, 1861

The Happiest Refugee: A Memoir, Anh Do, 2010

Stand by Me, film, Rob Reiner, 1986

Veronica Mars, television series, 2004

ABOUT THE WRITER

CRAIG SILVEY

Craig Silvey grew up on an orchard in Western Australia. He currently resides in Fremantle, where he wrote his first novel, *Rhubarb*, before he turned twenty. *Rhubarb* was published by Fremantle Press in 2004 and garnered strong reviews. In 2005, *Rhubarb* was chosen as the One Book for the Perth International Arts Festival, a successful state-wide reading initiative. Later that year, Craig received a Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Novelist Award. In 2006, *Rhubarb* was featured as one of the titles in the national Books Alive campaign. The following year, Craig released *The World According to Warren*, a picture book affectionately starring the guide-dog from *Rhubarb*.



In early 2008, Craig completed his second novel *Jasper Jones* with the aid of an Australia Council New Work Grant. *Jasper Jones* was published in 2009 by Allen & Unwin and went on to be published in the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and Germany. It won the 2009 Indie Book of the Year Award, the 2009 WA Premier's Literary Award for Fiction and the 2010 ABIA Book of the Year. It was also shortlisted for the 2010 Miles Franklin Literary Award, 2010 NSW Premier's Literary Award, 2010 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction and the 2011 International IMPAC DUBLIN Literary Award, and was named the 2012 Printz Honor book from Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association. *Jasper Jones* was adapted into a stage play in 2014 and made into a feature film in 2017.

Outside of literature, Craig is the singer/songwriter for the band 'The Nancy Sikes!'.