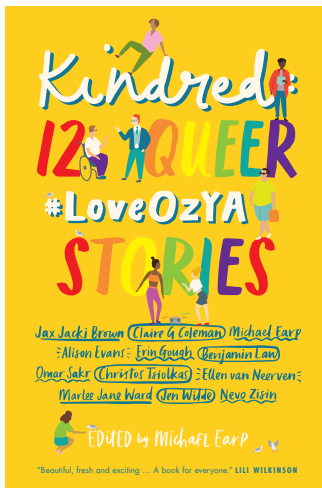


Kindred:
12 QUEER
#LoveOzYA
STORIES
EDITED by Michael Earp

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Twelve of Australia's best writers from the LGBTQ+ community are brought together in this ground-breaking collection of YA short stories.

What does it mean to be queer? What does it mean to be human? In this powerful #LoveOzYA collection, twelve of Australia's finest writers from the LGBTQ+ community explore the stories of family, friends, lovers and strangers – the connections that form us. This inclusive and intersectional #OwnVoices anthology for teen readers features work from writers of diverse genders, sexualities and identities, including writers who identify as First Nations, people of colour or disabled. With short stories by bestsellers, award winners and newcomers to young adult fiction including Jax Jacki Brown, Claire G Coleman, Michael Earp, Alison Evans, Erin Gough, Benjamin Law, Omar Sakr, Christos Tsiolkas, Ellen van Neerven, Marlee Jane Ward, Jen Wilde and Nevo Zisin.



Jax Jacki Brown



Claire G Coleman



Michael Earp



Alison Evans



Erin Gough



Benjamin Law



Omar Sakr



Christos Tsiolkas



Ellen van Neerven



Marlee Jane Ward



Jen Wilde



Nevo Zisin

Rats

Marlee Jane Ward

1. Describe the world of *Rats*. Why do you think the Rats live underground and are hunted by the Feds?
2. Marlee Jane Ward uses rhetoric in *Rats* such as "... so I got to just 'lax down here in the tunnels ..." (p 19) and "... it sounds hella romantic, though it's more a thumpy clutter of limbs ..." (p23). What effect does this have on the story?
3. Michelle calls the tunnels and the other Rats "home". What does "home" mean to Michelle? Why do you think it "feels like freedom" (p 21) to her even though she and the rats are under constant threat from the Feds?
4. How does Michelle feel when she first runs into Maita?
5. Why does Michelle "kinda love fleeing from the Feds" (p 26) even though it is so dangerous?
6. Once Michelle finally has a chance to spend time with Maita in the cafe, she thinks of her Rats and decides to leave to help them. What does this tell you about Michelle's values?
7. Why do you think Maita joins Michelle in rescuing the Rats?
8. How does Maita's influence help resolve the situation between the Rats and the Feds?



In Case of Emergency, Break Glass

Erin Gough

1. Why does Amy continue to kiss Steven when she is feeling "bored with kissing" (p 35) him? Does Steven realise this? How does this situation make each of them feel?
2. Natalia is described as very beautiful, making her more visible to the guests (her tray always empties first) and people address her as if she is in charge, while Amy's tray remains half full. Discuss this in terms of how society treats "beautiful" people compared to those that don't fit the standard idea of beauty.
3. How might Amy's interaction with Reg affect her after the events of the story? In addition to how she feels about Steven and her ex-boyfriends, what do you think Amy is discovering about her sexuality?
4. What is your interpretation of Reg? Do you think there are elements of magical realism in this story or could Amy just be seeing things?
5. Find a photo of a regent honeyeater. Compare its appearance to how Reg's appearance and clothing are described.
6. "...the skies open up and it rains like it hasn't rained for a thousand years ... the dead come alive again." (p 42-43). What do you think Reg is referring to here?
7. This story features a strong sustainability theme. The party is a celebration of a new housing development near Wollemi National park which will affect the local endangered regent honeyeater and Harry Gillespie announcing that he has hired Boz for his new ethical, sustainable restaurant. What do you take away from this story regarding sustainability?

Bitter Draught

Michael Earp

1. Although Simeon knows it's too early to harvest the wheat, he obeys his mother and begins the harvest. Why? Why does Wyll help him even though he also knows it is too early?
2. "Wyll rests his hand on Simeon's head, sliding his fingers into the mess of blond curls like a large, dusky comb." (p 61). What does this sentence tell you about Simeon and Wyll's relationship?
3. How does Wyll support Simeon through his grief and desperation?
4. Wyll says "it's very unlike you – to think of leaving" (p 64) to Simeon. How does the desperation Simeon feels from wanting to help Elzabe affect his actions?
5. Wren warns that "the full cost is never known till all is told" (p 72). What is the ultimate price Simeon pays? Do you think the price is fair?
6. Wyll tells Simeon that he has a desire to travel beyond their village, while Simeon desires to live a comfortable and familiar life in the village. Do you think the two boys could overcome this fundamental difference? Or do you think their conflicting desires will prevent them from being together?
7. Traditionally, stories with a similar setting to *Bitter Draught* would not include gay characters such as Simeon, Wyll and Char's mothers; or gender non-conforming characters like Wren. How does Earp subvert the genre by including queer representation in the story?
8. What is the significance of the title, *Bitter Draught*? What meanings does it hold for this story?

I Like Your Rotation

Jax Jacki Brown

1. When Jem sees Drew for the first time at the pool, she thinks "I'm not alone" (p 85). Why might this short sentence hold a lot of meaning for Jem?
2. Compare the characters of Jem and Drew: Jem is awkward, unsure of herself and inexperienced; while Drew is confident, educated and proud. Do you think they are compatible? What could they learn from each other?
3. Why does Jem get frustrated with people offering her help? How does it make her feel?
4. Jem worries "What if I don't look queer enough?" (p 90). What does she mean by that? What do you think a queer person should look like?
5. What happens at the queer collective meeting? How does it make Jem and Drew feel? Discuss the idea of intersectionality (where a person falls into multiple minority groups such as sexuality, disability, race, age, etc.) and how it is explored in this scene.
6. When Jem visits Drew's apartment, they share stories about their experience at school, coming to terms with their sexuality and their disability. How important do you think it is to talk with someone with a similar life experience to you? How do you think Jem feels here?
7. Why does Drew like to dye her hair? Discuss people's expectations of a wheelchair user and how Drew subverts those expectations.
8. Why do you think Jem is so upset at the movies when Drew says she likes her "but as a mate" (p 104)?
9. What change has been inspired in Jem through her relationship with Drew?



Sweet

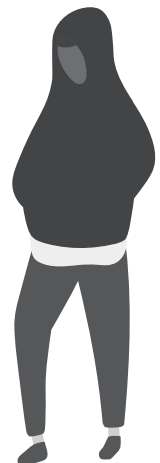
Claire G Coleman

1. *Sweet* is set in a somewhat futuristic, dystopian city and the opening of the story throws the reader into a disorienting bustle of people. Why do you think Coleman chose to throw the reader into Roxy's world in this way?
2. Discuss the symbolism of the upper-class people described at the beginning of the story populating the streets, while Roxy and their friends live in the dirty alleys and abandoned buildings. What is the class system in this story? Describe the kind of people who would belong in each class.
3. Roxy explains that their names, "Sweet" and "Roxy", were chosen, not their given names. Why do you think they don't use their given names?
4. Why do Roxy and their friends live in the slums? How has society ostracised them?
5. Describe the setting of *Sweet*. How does it differ to our world? What do these changes encourage you to think about or feel as a reader?
6. How does Roxy's experience as a person of colour contribute to their living situation?
7. Sweet "comes out" as gendered to her friends. How does this scene mirror how a queer person coming out to their friends might happen in real life?
8. What do you think a "gender crime" is in the context of this story?
9. Most of the characters in *Sweet* are referred to using gender-neutral they/them pronouns, though Roxy shares their ideas about whether her friends are "female-bodied" or "male-bodied". Does your interpretation of the characters change once their assigned sex is discussed?

Light Bulb

Nevo Zisin

1. *Light Bulb* features two distinct alternating sections: A person emerging from a cocoon and encountering an inky black creature, told in third-person; and the narrator's story from childhood to the present, told in first person. Why do you think the story was structured this way?
2. Compare the narrator's relationships with their mother and father. Why do you think the relationships were so different?
3. Discuss your interpretation of darkness in *Light Bulb*, i.e. the narrator is not afraid of the dark, mum is afraid of the dark, the inky creature, etc.
4. Why is the narrator "happy to be the thing that hid" (P 137) in the darkness?
5. Why does Dad take the narrator to Daylesford? How does the narrator respond?
6. How does the narrator respond to being bullied? What are they afraid of happening if they don't "put a blanket over the fire" (p 146) inside of themselves?
7. Why does the narrator avoid seeing their own reflection?
8. The narrator mentions how different clothes and body language lead people to different perceptions of their gender. How does this affect the narrator?
9. What do you think is the significance of Dad's note at the end of the story?
10. The narrator is not named nor gendered. Why do you think Zisin wrote the story this way?



Waiting

(Jen Wilde)

1. Why does Vanessa ask Audrey to put the jumper on? Why does Audrey agree?
2. How would you describe Vanessa's behaviour towards Audrey? Consider Vanessa leaving Audrey in line without warning and accusing her of being insecure.
3. Why does Audrey feel intimidated by Vanessa?
4. Luna wears a badge with "they/them" printed on it. What does this badge mean?
5. Why does Audrey think she should "tone down [her] glee" (p160)?
6. How does Audrey feel when she is introduced to Josie's friends? How does her reaction inform how she usually feels when hanging out with Vanessa? How important is it to find your people when you feel different?
7. Audrey cringes at the way Sully and Amanda use the word "nerd", but feels comforted by the way Josie uses it. Why does the same word have such a different effect on Audrey when it comes from different people?
8. Discuss the significance of Audrey taking off the jumper. How does it make her feel? What does this action represent for her relationship with Vanessa and her future?
9. Discuss the importance of representation in media, specifically how Audrey feels as a young bisexual woman seeing a positive representation of a bisexual woman in a mainstream TV show (Rosa Diaz in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*).
10. Ideally, how do you think Vanessa and Sully should have reacted to Audrey making new friends?



Laura Nyro at the Wedding

(Christos Tsiolkas)

1. Listen to Laura Nyro's *Wedding Bell Blues*. Why does Paul want this song at the wedding? Why do you think this story was named after the singer?
2. Jack employs stream-of-consciousness narration from pages 176-178 from when he states he wants his dad at the wedding to when he slowly nods in answer to Paul's question. Why do you think Tsiolkas wrote in this style? Why does discussing marriage make Jack remember his father, specifically the day he left?
3. Discuss Jack's feelings about his father and how they are incongruent with his mother and sister's feelings. Why are they so different?
4. How do Paul's parents respond to the news of the proposal?
5. Each member of Jack's family reacts and is affected by Jack's dad's infidelity in very different ways. Discuss this for each of the characters: Jack's mum, Jack's dad, Sara, Ben and Jack.
6. What do you think Jack's mum means when she says "it's a terrible burden when you don't know how to forgive" (p 193)?
7. How does Jack react when he meets Paul's parents? Why does he react this way? How does the argument that follows affect Jack and Paul's relationship?
8. Discuss the scene with Jack visiting his dad. Why does his dad say he won't come to the wedding?
9. Jack visits Ben's grave and says he just visited their dad. Why does Jack tell this to Ben's grave?
10. By the end of the story Jack thinks he doesn't want to get married. Discuss the difference between a wedding and a marriage, i.e. the pressure and importance placed on a wedding day (a public event including family, friends, etc.) versus the commitment of a marriage (a private agreement between two people).
11. Why does Paul say "I guess we're married" (p 204)? What does this say about Paul and Jack's interpretation of marriage? Discuss your understanding of marriage and what you think it should be.

Each City

≡ Ellen van Neerven ≡

1. Describe the setting of *Each City*. How is it similar and different to our own? What message might van Neerven have been trying to convey by creating a dystopian world that is not far removed from our own?
2. Why do you think the story is set in two parts?
3. Discuss the significance of languages other than English being outlawed, specifically for Indigenous people.
4. The narrator is never named nor gendered. Why do you think van Neerven made that character choice?
5. The narrator notes how Kate Bush's *The Dreaming* is an example of cultural appropriation. What is cultural appropriation? Watch the music video and read the lyrics for *The Dreaming* and discuss.
6. The narrator tells their new companions lies about Australia's wildlife and acceptance of LGBT+ people. Why do they lie about these issues?
7. Before the narrator goes on stage, they are visited by a spirit they believe to be their great-grandmother. Why does the spirit visit? What effect does the visit have on the narrator?
8. The story has an ambiguous ending with the narrator not certain Talvan sent the messages or if they and their companions are in danger from being raided. Why do you think van Neerven ended the story this way?
9. Think of a part of your own identity that you feel is essential to your existence. Imagine if it were made illegal to identify in that way. How would you feel? What lengths might you go to to be true to yourself?



An Arab Werewolf in Liverpool

Omar Sakr

1. Why does Wafat love weddings? What does that show about how he feels about himself normally?
2. This story is set in the Sydney suburb of Liverpool, with the narrator mentioning several local landmarks. Why do you think Sakr set this story in a real place? What can the reader infer from the setting?
3. Wafat, a Muslim, is both emotionally and sexually attracted to Noah. What reaction might his family have to Wafat being gay? Discuss the slurs used by Wafat's friends and people on the street and how they show the lack of acceptance of LGBT+ people in areas like Liverpool.
4. Discuss the significance of Wafat's transformation into a werewolf occurring after his kiss with Noah and the beginning of Ramadan.
5. Why aren't Noah and his friends allowed into the mall as a group? What does this show about the perception of Arabs in this area?
6. Why does Wafat mention that Noah lives on the North Shore and Wafat has never been far from Liverpool? Why is Wafat envious of Noah?
7. Wafat recounts hearing his uncles talking about the time they encouraged Wafat's mother to have an abortion and he describes his Auntie calling him "son" as a "yoke". Later he realises somewhere there is "a home that didn't resent him" (p 244). How does the feeling of being a burden or unwanted affect Wafat?
8. When Wafat and Noah are in the change room together, Wafat describes how something passes between them that makes him feel strong. Why do you think he finds this situation empowering?
9. Wafat realises that he had been with Andy, the dead dog's owner, in the alley where the dog's body was found. How does this revelation add to your understanding of the changes Wafat is going through?
10. What is your interpretation of the ending? Do you think the transformations were literal or figurative?

Stormlines

≡ Alison Evans ≡

1. What are Marling's beliefs about the sea? What do you think the stormlines drawn on her arm by Zaid mean?
2. Marling uses *ve/ver* pronouns and New uses *they/ them*. Discuss the importance of using pronouns that represent how one feels as a person. What other pronouns are used currently?
3. Discuss the setting of *Stormlines*. Do you think it is a dystopia set in our world, fantasy, etc.?
4. Marling is used to living in the pipes where it is crowded and dangerous, yet *ve* is alone. How does *ve* adjust to *ver* time in New's cabin?
5. Marling and New are both described as missing human contact. How important is contact to you? Consider all forms of affection both platonic and romantic. How do you think a lack of contact has affected Marling and New?
6. Zaid is mentioned numerous times in the story, though he is not present. Discuss the significance of Zaid being the only male character and a revered wise person. Also discuss how Marling's feelings about him conflict as *ve* respects him and he has marked *ver* skin, yet his incorrect information about the storm got Marling cast away from the pipes.
7. Why does Marling want to stay with New? How does New feel about that?
8. What is the significance of Marling saying the abandoned shack "could be home" (p 267)?

Questions to Ask Straight Relatives

Benjamin Law

1. The narrator and his cousin discuss the perception that there are more LGBT+ people in the world now versus the idea that LGBT+ people have always been around and are only now feeling more comfortable in public. How is this explored in the story? Do you believe this is what's happening in the world?
2. Discuss the intersectionality of the narrator being gay and Chinese. How does his family who live in Australia differ from his family in China?
3. The narrator asks his aunty "why does it matter?" (p 274) when she is asking why Melissa cuts her hair short and wears non-conformist clothes. Why is this question so powerful?
4. Many of the questions that are asked by the family are sparked when the narrator or Melissa don't conform to traditional behaviours, such as dressing/speaking "appropriately" for their gender, getting married, having children, etc. How does the narrator combat these questions?
5. What does the narrator realise is wrong with cringing when hearing a stereotypically camp gay man?
6. How does the narrator liken the camp TV presenter to his straight brother playing football? Where else could this comparison be made?
7. What does the narrator mean when he says "every type of gay person is valid" (p 281)?
8. Based on this story, what benefits could straight or cisgender people gain from looking at life through a queer lens?

