



WE DIDN'T THINK IT THROUGH

Written by GARY LONESBOROUGH

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 15+ (YOUNG ADULT/ UPPER SECONDARY)

GENRE: YA Fiction

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English: Literature, literacy and language
- HASS: History and Civics and Citizenship
- Health and Physical education: Personal, social and community health
- Cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (particularly the Organising Ideas under 'Country/Place' and 'Culture')
- General capabilities: Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding

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THEMES: First Nations Australians; racism; family; intergenerational trauma and family breakdown; kinship care; stolen generations throughout history and continuing in the present child safety system; belonging and friendship; inequality; injustice, youth justice system and police brutality; self-esteem and mental health; healthy choices and the impact of drugs and alcohol; connection to Country and strength of culture to support positive identities and wellbeing; #LoveOzYA.

SENSITIVITY WARNING

This novel deals with the challenging topics connected to intergenerational trauma and stolen generations, such as foster care, the child safety and youth justice systems. The main characters learn proactive strategies that help them manage and heal from their experiences; however, there is nonetheless a chance of triggering readers who are facing/have faced the same challenges in their lives. The initial introductory activities suggested allow for a discussion of the community services available for students and families needing support, and it is prudent to foreground this with the following list of support services:

LIFELINE AUSTRALIA: 13 11 14; <https://www.lifeline.org.au/> (includes online chat facility)

BEYOND BLUE: 1300 22 4636; <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/> (includes online chat facility)

KIDS HELPLINE: 1800 55 1800; <https://kidshelpline.com.au/> (includes online chat facility)

BE YOU: Resources for educators – <https://beyou.edu.au/>

REACH OUT: Resources for young people, parents and schools – <https://au.reachout.com/>

There are also some references to violence (fight scenes between boys, police/prison guards beating boys, and one male character whose father beats him) and there are some scenes depicting underage drinking and marijuana use. The main character actively rejects these experiences at the end of the novel and pursues a more positive lifestyle. He avoids fighting, is not proud of his part in previous fights, and makes a decision to move away from friends who use alcohol and drugs.

In realistically depicting teen culture, the author includes swearing in the dialogue. It is not overdone and can be understood in terms of the author's language choices; teachers are encouraged to consider how best to treat this within their school's context.

Depending on your school's context, it may be important to provide an explanation of the novel's content and the above resources to parents and carers before reading the novel in class so that they can support their young person at home. This would be a decision for your head of curriculum/head of faculty.

CULTURAL SAFETY

Before you begin, carefully consider the steps you can take to ensure that you are providing a culturally safe and inclusive space for everybody in your classroom and school. This may include undertaking cultural competency training, and reading widely and proactively to self-educate.

A useful resource on how to deal with texts sensitively in a culturally-safe manner is available in the blog post, [Culturally Sensitive Teaching](#), adapted from a presentation to the International Federation for the Teaching of English in 2020.

It is important that teachers monitor class conversation and students' comprehension of the novel to ensure that readers are not making generalisations about First Nations people based on the novel's content – like in any society, there are some people impacted by poverty, alcohol and drug use, who interact with the justice system, and there may be 'good' and 'bad' people, but this is not necessarily representative of all the people in that culture and is not inherent in their genetic make-up. Teachers should listen for and challenge any stereotyping that First Nations people are 'genetically predisposed' to certain behaviour or that 'all' First Nations people act in a certain way.

PLOT SUMMARY

We Didn't Think It Through is an evocative novel told from the point of view of Jamie Langton, a sensitive and thoughtful 16-year-old living with his aunty and uncle who is confused and angry about why his parents couldn't care for him and why his older brother left home and hasn't maintained contact. He is a reader and creative writer and his favourite subject is English with Mr Barrett, who is one of the only adults in his life to see potential in him.

As a teen, Jamie's anger about his family situation and the racism he faces daily from the police and the white 'footy heads' in the town (Mark Cassidy, Porter Davis and friends), leads him down a destructive path. He and his friends get into drinking and smoking and this places tension on his relationship with his aunty and uncle. His friends have similar challenges – one was born with foetal alcohol syndrome, one has a violent father, and they seek peace and belonging in hanging with each other and an older man in the town who supplies alcohol to underage kids at his 'party house'.

One fateful night, Jamie and his friends are walking through town when, unprovoked, Mark Cassidy and friends chase them in a car, force them off the road, call them junkies and start to beat them up before being interrupted by police. Under the influence of alcohol and marijuana, the boys' anger grows and they recall previous incidents where Mark Cassidy and his friends were racist toward them. They hatch a plan to steal Mark's car but are caught by police and sentenced to time in juvenile detention. This has major implications as Lenny was supposed to move to Sydney with his family the next week, Dally loses his apprenticeship, and all of them must make choices about how they re-set their lives and build a future after being in jail.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How can we define people in binary terms such as good/bad? Everyone makes mistakes, people can be good but make mistakes (Jamie and his friends), people can be kind and caring but get into trouble (Jamie's parents), people can be unkind but never come before the law or be judged for their acts (Mark Cassidy and friends)
- Recognising racism and its impact: the ongoing racist taunts from Mark Cassidy and his friends led to a 'breaking point' for the Valley boys – while they shouldn't have stolen Mark's car, their anger at his treatment of them was unresolved

- What difference does having a sense of family and belonging make? Jamie realises he has more going for him 'on the outside' than a lot of the other boys in jail (pp. 148 –9)
- How can we see the concepts of intergenerational trauma and systemic racism, the continuing impacts of colonisation, playing out in Jamie and his friends' experiences?
- Why is there an over-representation of First Nations youth in juvenile justice and child safety systems?

BEFORE READING

Community support services

Explain to students some of the topics and themes in the novel reflect some serious real-life community issues: teenage drinking, alcoholism and binge-drinking, drug use, anxiety, family breakdown, racism. Have students work in pairs or small groups to research and create a list of support services in their local community for both First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians. Teachers may find it useful to invite the school's counsellor, nurse or other wellbeing staff to talk with students and provide guidance with this task.

Have students share their findings with the class, and evaluate the effectiveness of the services on offer based on what they have found in their research – are there any gaps? Are there any potential areas for improvement?

Ensure that students' findings are displayed readily and accessible should anyone find they need support during the reading and discussion of the novel.

First Nations' perspectives

It is difficult to study texts by First Nations authors without an understanding of the geographical, cultural, sociopolitical and historical contexts in which the texts sit, or from which standpoint the text is being written.

Some key background readings and resources to support teachers engaging with texts by First Nations authors about First Nations' perspectives are listed below.

Relevant aspects of this information can be shared and discussed in class to set the context and background to the novel.

- [Welcome to Country: Youth Edition teachers' notes](#) by Melinda Sawers, published by Hardie Grant
Professor Marcia Langton, AO, is a prominent academic working in the Aboriginal education space. Her Welcome to Country series provides teachers with an excellent overview of First Nations histories and cultures to improve their cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. [Welcome to Country: Youth Edition teachers' notes](#) by Melinda Sawers includes a rich set of resources to develop teachers' background knowledge of key events, people and cultural considerations in First Nations' perspectives.

- **Oxford University Press Yarning Strong Professional Support**
This material supports teachers to understand the social and historical contexts for the series of books about Identity, Family, Law and Land. It answers questions and misconceptions to support teachers to deal with these sensitively in the classroom, questions such as 'What is Welcome to Country?' and 'How can you be Aboriginal if you don't have dark skin?'. The resource dispels negative stereotypes and racial assumptions through videos presented by prominent First Nations people including Larissa Behrendt, Willie Brim, Des Crump and Kym Smith.
- [Black Words Historical Events Calendar](#)
A resource outlining key people and events during various stages of colonised Australia, including the Government Protection Acts leading to removal of children for placement in missions and foster homes to be enculturated into Anglo customs (Stolen Generations). Also see Stolen Generations and Bringing Them Home report – National Museum of Australia resource.
- [Importance of land and connection to country](#)
A resource explaining the role of country in First Nations culture, how central it is to wellbeing and what the connection to land means for First Nations people.
- [Working with Indigenous Australians](#)
A website by the Muswellbrook Shire Council providing a clear and accessible outline of the eras of protectionism (missions), assimilation and self-determination and what these meant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people under Australian law.
- [Aboriginal Languages Map](#)
Provides a map of all known language groups in Australia and is useful to refer to when discussing the setting of the novel.

Q&A WITH GARY LONESBOROUGH

Can you tell us about your inspiration/how you came to write this book?

'I ran a program at juvenile justice centres for Aboriginal youth and was inspired to write *We Didn't Think It Through* because of a few Aboriginal boys I worked with in the program. The main character, Jamie, is influenced by a combination of these boys, many having been living in foster care/out-of-home care and removed from their parents at a young age. Many of them also lived with undiagnosed mental health issues and learning delays and had been disengaged with education. At that time, I was growing quite angry about the way these colonial structures and systems (juvenile justice, child protection) were failing these boys. I was angry about the lack of cultural support the boys had access to, the way these systems broke families apart and destroyed relationships, and how little I could actually do in a

support role when there are departments and hierarchies that had to assess and approve, over periods of months, all the efforts I'd tried to make to provide support.

'I wrote this story because the stories of those children are never heard. Their voices are never given volume and the general public has no idea the journeys they travel, nor the traumas they've overcome and continue to live with. Jamie came to me in almost a spiritual way. He became the character I could use to provide a glimpse into these unread stories and unheard voices.

'I wanted to dive deep into what it's like to be disconnected from your family, your culture, your traumas and dismissed by a society which refuses to accept that racism still exists, that colonisation is still impacting Aboriginal children in 2022, and that locking a child behind bars is not the answer.'

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: ENGLISH

Year 11–12

Unit 2 and 4

- Investigate the representation of ideas, attitudes and voices in texts
- Create a range of texts

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: ENGLISH

Year 10

- Language
- Literature
- Literacy

QUESTIONS – LANGUAGE FEATURES AND STYLE

- I. Throughout the novel, Jamie describes the clouds and sky. Consider how these descriptions enhance the scenes. Why is it interesting that throughout all his experiences, good or bad, he continues to look to the sky? Does this suggest a hopefulness or an ability to look outwardly and dream/strive for more?
 - a. 'The clouds aren't as thick over the ocean, and moonlight is breaking through to shine over the water' (p. 9), while on camp
 - b. 'My thoughts are dominated by the heat raging down on us from the cloudless sky' (p. 105), while in prison

- c. 'I looked out the window to the dark grey clouds above the bush...I felt scared, something bad was gonna happen' (p. 134), when young and with his parents in the broken-down car
 - d. 'There's not a cloud in the sky' (p. 144), when Jamie lies on the roof after the riot while the guards are taking the other boys inside
2. Intertextual references – works by Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Alison Whittaker, two prominent Aboriginal poets, figure in the story. Have students study a selection of their poems in pairs or small groups and draw comparisons with Lonesborough's novel in terms of ideas and themes that resonate. Resources available for teachers to support this task include a [Reading Australia unit on Oodgeroo](#) and [Teachers' notes by Magabala Books on Whittaker's Lemons in the Chicken Wire](#). Another collection of poems edited by Whittaker, *Fire Front*, published by UQP, includes [extensive teachers' notes](#) and is a fiercely political collection.
3. Intertextual references – renowned Aboriginal performer Archie Roach (dec.) is referred to multiple times throughout the novel and is associated with warm memories of Aunty Dawn and Uncle Bobby. Archie Roach's experiences as a member of the stolen generations are well known and represented in his song 'Took the Children Away'. Study the picture book version of this song and consider some of the questions outlined in this [Reading Australia unit of work](#). Compare and contrast Archie Roach's song with the contemporary rap song by Briggs, 'The Children Came Back', which was written as an 'answer' to Roach and a celebration of Aboriginal survival.
4. Juxtaposition – there are moments of naive innocence juxtaposed with scenes of danger and destruction, e.g. when the boys are in the stole car and Jamie suddenly worries about wombats and kangaroos (p. 49), or when Jamie is in prison and has a memory of singing and dancing to the Wiggles' songs 'Hot Potato' and 'Fruit Salad' with his mum (p. 123). How do these moments position Jamie for us as a reader? What are we encouraged to feel about him in these moments?
5. Poetry – disturbing scenes in the novel are written in poetic verse. Divide the class into small groups and have each group analyse one, using the [SLIMS and SPECS framework](#). Notice how employing poetic verse allows the author to control pace, tone and mood to match the scene and emphasise the emotions in the scene?
 - a. Car crash scene, pp. 57–56
 - b. Travelling to prison, p. 757, moving through the prison, p. 95
 - c. Prison routine, p. 113
 - d. 'Riot' scene, pp. 140–144
 - e. Thinking about Lenny, pp. 170–1-
 - f. Challenge by Shae to write poetry, the 'mother/aunt' poem, pp. 183, 187
 - g. Out of prison and back at school, in English class, p. 220

- h. Poem about prison – 'The Dark Place', p. 270
- 6. Music – musical references abound throughout the novel, mostly rap/hip hop artists: Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar, Eminem. Consider why these artists resonate with Indigenous youth – see the [SMH article on Indigenous Hip-Hop providing a voice to fight oppression](#). Create a playlist of key rap/hip hop songs that challenge racism and oppression and annotate the playlist with what each song means/achieves.
- 7. Humour – Consider the use of dark humour by the characters: how does it help them get through difficult situations?
 - a. Justin Bieber still singing after they crash the car, p. 58
 - b. She'll rip me up like a roast chicken (anticipating Aunty Dawn's reaction to Jamie stealing a car), p. 72
 - c. When in segregation and Shae asks to talk with him, 'Sure. I'm not too busy', p. 157
 - d. When the prison psychologist tells Jamie she wants to do breathing techniques with him to help him with his anger and his response is "No, thank you," I say. "I can breathe just fine, been doing it my whole life." (p. 180)
 - e. When Jamie's dad is telling them about his cancer diagnosis and Trey jokes that at least this couch doesn't smell of 'pissy dog hair', and they all laugh, p. 286

Discussion Questions – themes

Depending on the dynamics of your class, these could be discussion questions, private journal response questions, or private responses that you then invite volunteers to share in a class discussion – consider how best to ensure your students will feel comfortable and safe.

- 1. Setting: the novel is set in the fictitious small coastal town of Dalton's Bay. It is divided between 'the valley' where the Aboriginal people and poor people live and 'the northside' – where the richer 'white' people like Mark Cassidy and his mates live. Collect key quotes on pages 21–22 that illustrate this divide. Consider:
 - a. Why do the 'lads from the North' drive around the valley?
 - b. What does this suggest about power relationships in the town?
 - c. Who bullies who, who is 'in charge', who has more power? Inequality in society?
- 2. In Chapter 29 Jamie finds out the main reason Trey felt he had to leave Dalton's Bay at 16. Travis and his friends were Trey's school mates and they used to taunt him for being gay: calling him 'fag', 'poof' and 'pillow-biter'. At first Jamie is very affronted by

this, since Travis now runs cultural camps and is a youth worker and 'role model' for the boys. But he reflects that people can change, can become better people.

- a. Do you think Travis has a right to be in the role he is in now given his past behaviour?
 - b. How/when do we know someone has changed or been 'rehabilitated'?
 - c. When should people be given chances to prove they have grown/changed?
 - d. Should we dismiss childhood bullying as just misguided behaviour?
 - e. What difference could have been made to Trey and Jamie's lives if such homophobia had been addressed and stopped at the time?
3. Theme of police brutality and the ineffective juvenile justice system: Chapter 14 is a significant one where violence erupts in jail and the prison guards respond to the boys' behaviour with force. There are vivid scenes of large, armed men brutally beating the unarmed boys. While the boys have done the wrong thing, the level of force from the guards is disproportionate. One boy, Ronnie, tells Jamie that he has nothing going for him outside of jail and he actually feels better off inside prison, suggesting that jails do not rehabilitate, but rather reinforce, criminal behaviour. Discuss the role of juvenile justice and what it should look like, using stimulus such as excerpts from [the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory](#), sparked by the [ABC Four Corners report on Dylan Voller and the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre](#).
4. Theme of stolen generations, past and present: the book makes the point that although we talk about the routine removal of Aboriginal children from their families as being part of a past government practice ('stolen generations'), it continues to happen in different ways today. Many First Nations families are still suffering from poverty, alcoholism, violence and other challenges which may be due to past family separation and trauma. Child safety laws lead to removal of children and placement in foster care, or in some cases kinship care (living with relatives, like Jamie and Trey Langton), leading to young people being angry and disenfranchised and getting into the juvenile justice system like Jamie. Uncle Bobby sums it up:

"This colonial system is hard for us blackfullas to deal with," he says. "That's the way it was built and designed, so they always hold power over us, so that we can never win. They reckon that the Stolen Generations ended years ago, but you boys are proof nothing ended. The white colonial system just found another way. It's a quieter way, now, but it's the same." (pp. 214–5)

Consider the key quotes about Jamie and his brother's experiences:

- A memory of fishing with dad, learning what makes you a man (p. 20)
- A memory of Jamie's mum filming him dancing, and dancing with his mum (p. 117–8, p. 123)

- A memory of supervised visits with parents and then of his dad being in a police station, arrested for being drunk in public (p. 132)
- A memory of being in a broken-down car, no petrol, parents drunk and fighting (p. 134)
- His happiest memory of mum – when they were watching the fireworks on a blanket on the ground outside the show gates, as they couldn't afford to go to the show (p. 160)
- A memory of falling of his bike and asking Trey to get him an ambulance, but Trey told him he couldn't ring the ambulance (pp. 177–8)
- A memory of mum and dad fighting, upset, talking about 'if they take my boys' (p. 184)
- The memory of being taken from parents, both parents crying (pp. 199–200)
- When reunited at the end of the novel, they hear Mum and Dad's latest news – they travelled to Alice Springs to buy a car off a relation, it broke down, they hitchhiked and slept in a park in the Blue Mountains (p. 285)
- Jamie's dad mentions he had some stints in 'juvie' and 'the boys home' and in jail a few times as an adult (p. 285)

From these snippets of information, consider:

- a) What could we surmise led to Jamie and Trey's removal?
 - b) Is it as simple as saying that they were 'bad parents'?
 - c) Can we imagine what Jamie's dad's life may have been like, and whether this contributed to him abusing alcohol?
 - d) What barriers may have stopped them from being able to secure appropriate housing and get custody of their sons back?
5. Theme of racism: Jamie recalls a time when Mark Cassidy refused to get into the same swimming pool as Jamie and the other Aboriginal kids, resulting in Jamie and Dally fighting him and getting suspended (p. 37). We learn later in the novel that Jamie gave up playing football at 14 due to Mark and his friends' racism (p. 100). The police in Dalton's Bay and one of the guards in jail regularly make comments such as 'you blackfellas never learn' (p. 624 p. 174).
- a. What action appears to be taken to stop racist comments being made? Do you feel more should have been done to intervene?
 - b. Have you ever been in a situation where a rude, ignorant, or discriminatory comment has been made and you've felt uncomfortable? (racist, sexist, homophobic, etc). How did you feel? Did you speak up against it?

- c. Review the information from the [Human Rights Commission 'It stops with me' campaign on 'bystander action'](#). How realistic is it to ask people to speak up and call out poor behaviour such as racism? What can make this a hard thing to do? What would help make this an easier thing to do?
- d. The detention centre has Aboriginal liaison workers who talk with the First Nations boys, and they run 'Aboriginal programs' such as dance. Many schools also implement such programs for First Nations students, and youth centres run cultural camps and experiences such as the one Travis took the boys on in Chapter 1 (which Andy called 'a refresher for the soul', p. 20). Why are such programs important? Can these programs alone change the experiences of First Nations young people? What else is needed?
- e. **Extension activity:** research the effects of racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Create an infographic outlining key health and wellbeing impacts and tips on how to be an ally and take action to address racism.

ASSESSMENT:

- Devise a storyboard and concept for how to adapt this novel into film. See the Victorian Department of Education Literacy Resources, ['Transforming existing texts'](#) for ideas on how to analyse and annotate a text ready to transform into a storyboard for film.
- Write a set of poems or rap/song lyrics to represent the journey of one of Jamie's friends: Lenny, Dally or Andy. You may wish to use ideas from the novel, such as connection to Country, family and belonging, having 'something going for you on the outside' (out of prison), becoming a man by the decisions you make, the effect of racism, intergenerational trauma. Write a 200-word rationale to explain your language choices in the poems/lyrics.
- Discussion/Essay: Aunty Dawn tells Jamie that she has seen cases like his play out in family services and youth justice hundreds of times. Other people can only help so much and then it is up to Jamie to do the rest, make the right choices, access the help on offer. This ultimately places the responsibility on the 'victim' of bad circumstances to make choices for a better life. Agree or disagree with this statement, using evidence from the novel as well as any non-fiction sources of your choice.
- Design a more appropriate 'detention' arrangement for young offenders. Include architectural/engineering design features of the building as well as a timetable, how the days should be spent, and what support/counselling/education should be offered. How should staff be hired and trained for this facility, and what cultural background/knowledge should they have? How can young people show their rehabilitation and be re-entered into the community? What support should follow them when they are released? Consider the recommendations of the [Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory](#), (summarised throughout the report in pink text boxes).

- Complete a collage/artwork representing the importance of adults who believe in or see something in a young person (as Shae and Mr Barrett did with Jamie). Write a 200-word rationale to explain your creative choices and how they relate to the themes of the novel.

Character development: close analysis task

'It's a moment that makes a man, a decision' (p. 20)

This is a profound coming-of-age story for the protagonist, Jamie, who grows and matures from an angry young boy who can't express his feelings, to a boy who can express himself and advocate for what he needs, and finds strength in reuniting with his family. He makes a choice to walk away from the 'angry' kid who hung around town drinking and doing drugs, even walking away from his friends. By the end of the novel he is calm, in control of himself, and happy, and he is very sure he won't ever go back to jail.

Students can map Jamie's development by drawing and annotating a 'character arc' outlining the key events in the novel where Jamie is faced with a choice and how each choice impacts him. Teachers can use the summary with key quotes below to support students with this task.

Consider also how the titles of each Part of the book guide us through Jamie's journey: The Boy, The Dark Place, The Man. Is it necessary to go through a 'dark place' before coming of age? How can that look for different people? What kind of support do adolescents need while they are in a 'dark place'?

Other useful teacher resources for this task are:

- How to create character arcs by Abbie Emmons
- Character arcs in storytelling unit on Khan Academy

Character summary: Jamie Langton

Jamie lives with his Aunty, but we don't know why exactly. We learn early in the novel that his parents are sporadically in contact, and his mum rings for the first time in four years to tell them that his dad is sick with cancer and would like to see him (p. 17). This makes Jamie feel angry and he refuses to talk to or see his parents. Jamie is becoming known as 'the angry guy' (p. 5), but he doesn't want to be. When we meet him, he is unable to express his true feelings and thoughts. He wishes he wasn't so short-tempered but doesn't seem to ask for help with this (p. 5). At the end of a boys' camp where they are being asked to set goals, he wants to make a goal to be better to his Aunty but instead makes a dismissive joke:

"Uhh . . . My goal is . . . to . . . not die this year."

"Right." Travis chuckles and a few kids chuckle along with him.' (p. 6).

At the end of camp, he's rude to camp leader, Travis, and immediately feels bad: '...and now I feel shitty. I'm an arsehole. But I didn't mean to be – not really.' (pp. 12–13). He wants to apologise but can't make himself speak: 'I want to apologise, and I should, but my lips won't part.' (p. 14).

We also learn that at 14, Jamie had quit footy due to the racism of the boys at football (p. 100). This may have been another turning point for him heading down the pathway into unhealthy behaviours, drinking and crime – no longer having a regular commitment, a physical outlet for his anger, or an incentive to stay healthy.

But despite his behaviour we hear that his English teacher, Mr Barrett, sees talent in him and he has achieved good grades in his writing (p. 17). Jamie shrugs it off now, but it is this talent that becomes his strength and helps him improve his relationships with people later in the novel. The Aboriginal liaison worker in the jail, Shae, gets him involved in a library project, where he admits he is a reader but has to manage this carefully so as not to be teased by the other boys. He is fascinated by a poetry book and keeps a hand-written copy of an Oodgeroo Noonuccal poem that falls out of one of the pages (pp. 119–120).

After an outburst of anger that lands Jamie in segregation, Shae gives him a challenge to use poetry to get all his feelings out (p. 182). He does, and they share poems with each other next time she visits (pp. 195–6). One of the other inmates mentions seeing them reading to each other and tells him 'that's gay as', but rather than get angry and fight him, Jamie walks away and goes to get another serving of food (p. 196). This is a turning point where we see Jamie become calmer. He soon reflects on his childhood and admits that he misses his parents (p. 198).

At the end of the book, we see the choices Jamie has – to stay in Dalton's Bay in the same routine of drinking and getting in trouble with his friends, or to accept his older brother's offer to live with him in Sydney and reconnect with his parents. At this point, Jamie makes a few poor decisions before finally getting on track – he snubs his brother's invitation to cook dinner together and goes out drinking, putting himself in danger as Mark Cassidy and his friends are sending threats and seeking revenge on Jamie's group for stealing their car. He fights Mark and wins: but he doesn't want the 'glory', and when people say he now 'owns' the town, he thinks 'I don't wanna [own it]' and he tells his friends he's going home (p. 263). He makes the decision then to move to Sydney with his brother, cease contact with the Dalton Bay friends, and reconnect with his parents. The novel ends with the family back together sharing fish and chips. His questions about why his parents couldn't care for them and why they didn't fight harder to regain custody remain unanswered, and he wants to feel anger but he can't:

'I want to be angry. I should be angry. Anger should be coming so easily to me, bursting out of my chest in the blink of an eye. But as I rest back in my chair, as I stare at my mother and my father and Trey, a smile comes to my face. They smile back at me and I'm warm. I'm all good. A feeling is coming over me – a feeling I'm not used to. It's a feeling I've had before but one that's been gone for so long: happiness' (p. 288).

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Year 10

Gender stereotypes and LGBTQIA+ rights

The boys in this novel receive a lot of mixed messages about what constitutes being a 'real man', some positive and some negative:

- Jamie is ashamed to cry in front of Trey because he wants to prove he's grown up
- Physical prowess is admired and Mark Cassidy and his friends pride themselves on 'winning' fights; Jamie's friends get angry and want to fight the lads from the north
- Jamie's dad tells him that you become a man by the decisions you make
- The other boys in prison think that reading and writing is 'gay'
- Trey had to leave town due to the homophobic taunts he received as a teen
- The young female characters in the novel are very peripheral and mostly feature as sexual playthings, with rules about who can 'play' with whom, as Jamie turns down an advance from Jess because she used to go with Dally. The girls are active in drinking and taking drugs and make choices to kiss/sleep with the boys so it is consensual, but we don't see any romantic relationships forming
- The older female characters are generally loving, warm and encouraging – Shae, Auntie Dawn, Jamie's mum – and very forgiving of the boys' behaviour
- Jamie's favourite teacher is a male English teacher and the class applauds Jamie at the end of the novel when he reads his poem aloud

Discuss the positive and negative representations of gender and sexuality in the novel, reflecting on the extent to which these reflect students' real-life experiences. The resources from Stonewall.com are useful here.

The overrepresentation of Indigenous people in incarceration, deaths in custody, police attitudes

When Jamie and his friends walk into Mark Cassidy's street on the north side of the town, Jamie reflects that there are no cops because there are 'no Kooris here' (p. 42).

Research:

- What are the incarceration rates of Indigenous people compared to other Australians?
- What are the possible factors for these rates?
- In what ways do police racism or lack of cultural competency play a part in these rates?
- What are some of the recommendations around preventing deaths in custody?

- What do we notice about how Indigenous crimes are reported in the media?
Resources:
- [National Justice Project - advocacy papers](#)
- [Amnesty international - explainer video](#)
- [Rapper Briggs report from inside juvie - The Guardian article](#)
- [In my blood it runs, documentary](#) and [teacher resource](#)
- [ABC Media Watch episode 35, 'Minor Debacle'](#), broadcast 8 October 2018

Teachers can also look for and select local newspapers/online articles where relevant.

ASSESSMENT:

Research task

In pairs or small groups, students can research the topic of binge-drinking and statistics around alcohol-related illness, injury and death in Australia, then present their findings in an oral presentation to the class, utilising multimodal methods of conveying information (e.g. Prezi, PowerPoint, Infographic poster).

After students have presented their work, engage in class discussion to summarise key findings, during which teachers can:

- Encourage students to reflect on alcohol abuse as a broader Australian health issue rather than only an Indigenous health issue, and to consider why it might be that public opinion views alcohol abuse as a common Indigenous problem.
- Consider the fact that all of the young people in *We Didn't Think It Through*, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, engage in under-age binge-drinking culture, but a big difference is that Mark Cassidy's friends have a party at his house while Jamie and his friends are out roaming the streets. Consider Jamie's father and the fact that he had a problem with alcohol – could this be due to trauma/bad experiences, stress from poverty?

Teachers may find it useful to provide a note-taking scaffold for students when they are audience members, taking notes about each presentation in a way that will support this culminating class discussion.

HASS

Year 10

Activities

- The racist incident where Mark Cassidy refused to swim in a pool with Aboriginal students is an historical reference to a time when there was segregation in many small towns across Australia. The 1965 'Freedom Rides' addressed the poor living conditions and lack of rights of Aboriginal people all over country NSW, and during the movement they protested against a colour ban at Moree pool and were successful in overturning the ban. Research the Freedom Rides further. The [National Museum of Australia](#) has a useful digital resource.
- Research 2–3 famous Indigenous Australian sportspeople, artists, bands/singers who have taken social action to fight for justice and equality, rights and freedoms. Outline the years they have worked, the work they have done and key quotes/important things they have said. Examples include: (AUS) Adam Briggs, Adam Goodes, Archie Roach, Rachel Perkins, Larissa Behrendt, Terry Janke, Mick Dodson, Eddie Betts, Jonathan Thurston, Cathy Freeman, Nakkiah Lui, Stephen Oliver, Deborah Mailman, Leah Purcell, Linda Burney. Students can present their findings in the format of an article in *The Guardian*.

ASSESSMENT:

Annotated bibliography

Complete an annotated bibliography compiling key sources on the significant events and people in the Australian First Nations civil rights movement: including the 1938 Day of Mourning; 1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation movement; Mabo decision; Royal Commission into Black deaths in custody and subsequent key events in this area; Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations); the Apology; the Statement from the Heart/Makaratta.

For each key source found on each topic, include:

- Citation
- Summary of the source's content and main purpose
- Outline of key findings/key ideas in the source
- Evaluation of the reliability and verity of the source and/or its contribution to the field of knowledge

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Lonesborough is a Yuin man, who grew up on the Far South Coast of NSW as part of a large and proud Aboriginal family. Gary was always writing as a child, and continued his creative journey when he moved to Sydney to study at film school. Gary has experience working in youth work, Aboriginal health, child protection, the disability sector (including experience working in the youth justice system) and the film industry, including working on

the feature film adaptation of Jasper Jones. His debut YA novel, *The Boy From The Mish*, was published by Allen & Unwin in 2021. It was published in the US in 2022 under the title *Ready When You Are*.

<https://garylonesborough.com/>

IN THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR

'I hate that I stopped writing. I stopped reading books too, because I could never see myself in them. Aboriginal characters were always secondary, written by non-Indigenous authors and different from my reality...

It is important for Aboriginal kids to be able to read and love books written by Aboriginal authors – books where they can see themselves in the pages.'

Lonesborough, G. 2021. 'I stopped reading because I couldn't see myself in books. So I wrote one instead', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/01/i-stopped-reading-because-i-couldnt-see-myself-in-books-so-i-wrote-one-instead>>

For a discussion about his journey as a writer, and media interviews, see videos on his website: <https://garylonesborough.com/mediaandinterviews>

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Cara Shipp is a Wiradjuri/Welsh woman (descending from the Lamb and Shipp families in Central Western NSW, around Dubbo, Parkes and Trangie) and currently Head of Senior School at Silkwood School, Gold Coast, QLD.

She has previously run alternative educational programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; held Head Teacher English/HASS/Languages positions; and served as President, Vice President and Editor with the ACT Association for the Teaching of English (ACTATE). Cara has completed a Master of Education focusing on Aboriginal literacy and regularly presents cultural competence training at local and national conferences, particularly within the context of incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the English curriculum. She has a blog on the topic <https://missshipp.wordpress.com/>

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

Similar coming-of-age, identity exploration novels dealing with racism, poverty, crime and justice, by First Nations authors:

Gary Lonesborough, *The Boy from the Mish*, with upcoming unit of work by Reading Australia

Sue McPherson, *Brontide*, with upcoming unit of work by Reading Australia and teachers' notes by Magabala Books

Amy Thunig, *Tell me again*, memoir with [teachers' notes](#) by UQP

Short story and poetry collections by First Nations authors about important socio-historical themes:

Fire Front, edited by Alison Whittaker, with [teachers' notes](#) by UQP

Flock, curated by Ellen van Neerven, with [teachers' notes](#) by UQP

Born into this, Adam Thompson, with [teachers' notes](#) by UQP

OTHER RESOURCES

State Library of Queensland, Sovereign Stories online resource: [Teacher resource](#) for key books by First Nations authors published under the black & write! initiative.

[Common Ground](#), First Nations published website with resources and explainers on key topics such as land rights and Connection to Country.

[National Museum of Australia: rights and freedoms digital resource and civil rights timeline.](#)

QLD Indigenous stories from the Youth Justice System (QLD remains the state with the highest incarceration rates of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) – [Yarning for Change](#) resource.

ONLINE LINKS IN FULL

[Welcome to Country: Youth Edition teachers' notes](#)

Accompaniment to Marcia Langton's non-fiction guide to First Nations Australian culture, prepared by educator Melinda Sawers and published by Hardie Grant.

[Black Words Historical Events Calendar](#)

Outline of key events in colonial history from a First Nations standpoint, published by AustLit.

[National Museum of Australia resource 'Aborigines Protection Act'](#), on the Stolen Generations and Bringing Them Home report.

[Importance of land and connection to country](#)

A resource by Common Ground, explaining the role of country in First Nations culture, how central it is to wellbeing and what the connection to land means for First Nations people.

[Working with Indigenous Australians](#) website by the Muswellbrook Shire Council. Historical and cultural information 'Working with Indigenous Australians, First Nations people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities', prepared by the Aboriginal Policy Reference Group and the Muswellbrook Shire Council, 2007.

[The Gambay First Languages Map](#)

Published by First Languages Australia as part of the Australian Government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program.

[Aboriginal Languages Map](#)

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).