

MY SPARE HEART

By Jared Thomas

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.

RECOMMENDED FOR: 13–18 years old,
Years 8–12, mid to upper secondary

THEMES: Alcoholism and dealing with addiction in families; racism and prejudice; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, histories and cultures; family; family breakdown and divorce; basketball; self-esteem and mental health; connection to Country and strength of culture to support during challenging times. There is also a minor theme and sub-plot that offers the opportunity to discuss sexual harassment and consent.

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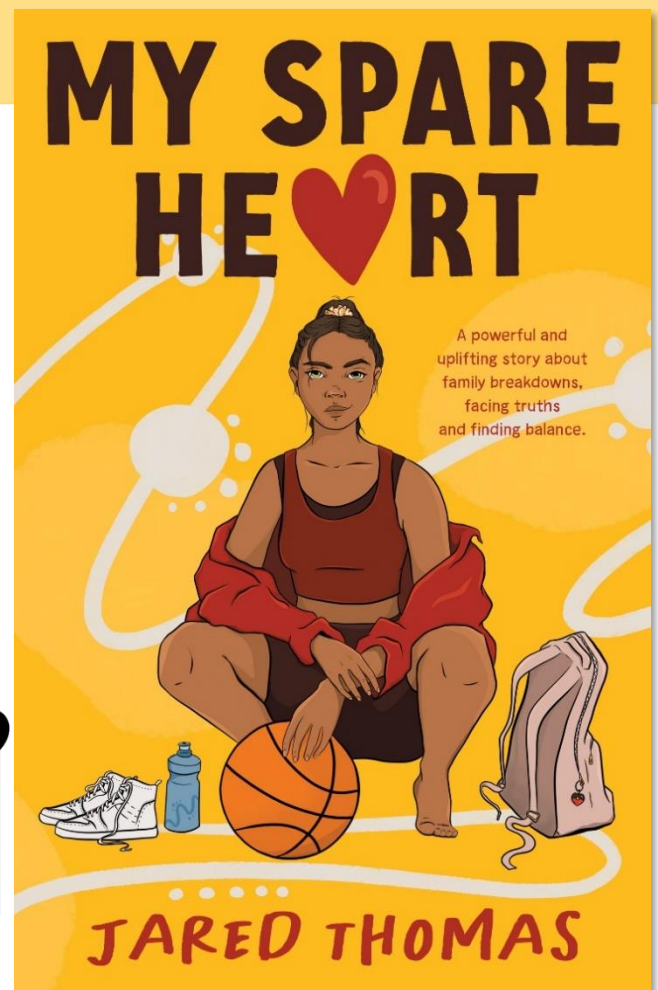
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CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- **ENGLISH:** Literature, literacy and language (Years 8-10)
- **HASS:** History and Civics and Citizenship (Year 10)
- **Health and Physical education:** Personal, social and community health (Years 9-10)
- **Cross-curriculum priority:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (Organising Ideas 2, 3, 6 and 9)
- **General capabilities:** Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding

I think when you're writing you've got to be passionate about what you're writing about so if there's a subject that may rattle you a bit or upset you or get a fire in your belly that's a good starting point. – Jared Thomas

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INTRODUCTION

My Spare Heart is a powerful and sensitively-written novel told from the point of view of seventeen-year-old Phoebe, who has moved to live with her father and his new partner following her parents' divorce. The story begins with Phoebe feeling the usual resentment around the upheaval: protective of her mother, yearning to be back in the city with Mum and her friends, and seeing Caitlin, her 'step-mum', as responsible for breaking her parents up and ripping her away from her life.

However, seeing her mum and her old life from the outside now, Phoebe very quickly begins to realise the extent of her mother's alcoholism and becomes convinced of the need for her whole family to attend therapy to deal with these challenges.

As she rebuilds her life, she finds her Aboriginal identity both challenged and reaffirmed. She navigates new friendships, making her own poor judgements along the way and encountering racism, drug and alcohol abuse, and sexual harassment. She learns and adopts health-coping strategies and positive psychology, which, along with her strength in culture passed on to her by her father, help her to come away from life's challenges with confidence and conviction.

The novel immediately challenges stereotypes by setting the alcoholic characters as non-Indigenous. Phoebe's father is Aboriginal and her mother is non-Indigenous/Anglo-Australian, and it is her mother who struggles with alcoholism, is unreliable and irresponsible in her parenting of Phoebe, and has trouble making the financial commitment to maintain her home.

The other alcoholic characters are parents of Phoebe's peers, all non-Indigenous. This appears to be a deliberate choice, and it allows readers to focus on the important social problem of alcoholism itself, rather than be caught up in racist stereotyping about Aboriginal people being alcoholics. It also drives home the point that alcoholism, and addiction more broadly, is a highly relatable topic: it is a widespread problem which impacts many families from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

SENSITIVITY NOTE

This novel deals with the challenging topics of alcoholism and sexual harassment/assault; however, there are no strongly graphic scenes. Both topics are dealt with positively in the sense that the characters impacted learn proactive strategies that help them manage and heal from their experiences.

There is nonetheless a chance of triggering readers who are facing or have faced the same challenges in their lives. The initial introductory activities in these teachers notes 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/>
- AL-ANON: 1300 252 666
<https://www.al-anon.org.au/>
- ALATEEN <https://www.al-anon.org.au/alateen>
- BEYOND BLUE: 1300 22 4636
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>
- KIDS HELPLINE: 1800 55 1800
<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- BE YOU: Resources for educators <https://beyou.edu.au/>
- REACH OUT: Resources for young people, parents and schools; <https://au.reachout.com/>

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 or head of faculty.

PLOT SUMMARY

Phoebe's family has fallen apart. Her non-Indigenous mother, a busy event manager, and her father, an Aboriginal man and uni lecturer, have split up and she's moved to sleepy old Willunga with him and his new health-obsessed girlfriend. Phoebe's only a few kilometres from her mum and her old friends in the city, but it may as well be another world.

It's meant to be a fresh start away, but with a weird new school, a new basketball team and her mum who is becoming increasingly unreliable, Phoebe doesn't know who to turn to. The move and the highly competitive basketball team, combined with the ongoing stress of her mother's drinking, starts to take its toll. Phoebe's grades suffer, her place in the basketball team is under threat and she's starting to show some of the same risk-taking behaviour as her mother.

While her dad is certain he knows what is best for Phoebe, she's not coping at all until they eventually turn to professional help. Finally, they can see Phoebe's mother's addiction for what it is – an illness – and can help their whole family chart a way forward, together.

Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR, JARED THOMAS

How did the idea for *My Spare Heart* develop?

I was compelled to write *My Spare Heart* after a meeting in New York where a publisher asked about the next book I was going to write. I didn't have anything in mind, but wanting to impress, I started to fictionalise on the spot the hardest thing I've had to deal with in my life – which is witnessing from many angles the impact of alcoholism on families.

Then on the plane trip I misheard a Courtney Barnett song where I thought she sang the words 'My Spare Heart', which I thought would make a great title, and the story unfolded from there.

What do you see as the major themes or essence of this book?

The major essence of this book is the confusion and anxiety that addiction, specifically alcoholism, can cause for friends and family members of addicts.

Themes include the power of Aboriginal culture as a support mechanism for young Aboriginal people, the importance of friendship and family support and professional help for dealing with complex problems, and the impact of racism and the importance of addressing it.

Can you tell us about your inspiration for this book?

The book is written for anyone but especially young people that are impacted by someone in their life, a parent or relative, that is suffering from alcoholism.

Alcoholism is prominent internationally but very few of us have the tools to know how to protect ourselves from its impact.

One of the inspirations for writing the book was dispelling myths regarding Aboriginal people and alcohol

abuse, showing that the problem is a broad one, and that Aboriginal people possess attitudes about alcohol that rarely are communicated to the broader public.

I also wanted to show diversity of Aboriginal identity, and through the character of Phoebe, the multidimensional life of a young Aboriginal person, that enjoys contemporary culture but also holds her culture close to her heart.

What led you into writing as a career?

I grew up in Port Augusta in South Australia and wanted to write after seeing the play *Funerals and Circuses* by Aboriginal playwright Roger Bennett, which is about black and white relations in a regional town. I was sixteen when I saw the play. It was the first example that I saw of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together to address racism. It alerted me to the value of communicating my and my family's experiences and the environment that I grew up in.

Consequently, my first play, *Flash Red Ford*, was performed in Kenya and Uganda in 1999. I wrote several other plays before transitioning to writing fiction.

What are your other interests outside of writing?

In addition to being a writer, I'm interested in many things including surfing, scuba diving, and contributing to ecological restoration with my Nukunu community in the Southern Flinders Ranges. My geek hobby is restoring 80s and 90s BMX bikes.

During my childhood and teenage years, I played cricket, football and basketball, and have only recently taken a break from playing basketball. Something I'm really glad that I had the opportunity to do as a sixteen or seventeen-year-old, was to play for the Port Adelaide Football Club.

FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES

It is difficult to study texts by First Nations authors without an understanding of the geographical, cultural, socio-political 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.

Yarning Strong Professional Support (Oxford University Press)

This material supports teachers to understand the social and historical contexts for the 'Yarning Strong' 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.

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.

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.

Aboriginal Languages Map

A [map](#) that attempts to represent the language, social or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia, which is useful to refer to when discussing the setting of the novel.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

BEFORE READING

Community support services

Explain to students that 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, divorce and family breakdown, and 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.

ENGLISH

Year 11–12: Unit 2 & 4

LITERATURE



Connection to Country

Chapter 3 and 14 are key chapters where Phoebe and her father's cultural heritage and connection to Country is explored.

Investigate the representation of ideas, attitudes and voices in texts

Year 8: Explore the interconnectedness of Country/Place, People, Identity and Culture in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors.

Year 8, 9, 10: Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts.

Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts.

Analyse and evaluate text structures and language features of literary texts and make relevant thematic and intertextual connections with other texts.

- How does knowledge of their culture and social connections with other Aboriginal people help them to regain strength and confidence in difficult times?
- In what ways is their connection to the land part of their identity?
- Does reading Phoebe's dad's perspective about alcohol use among Aboriginal people help to dispel myths and stereotypes that Aboriginal people abuse alcohol? What key points stand out to you in his discussion?
- Do you think that connecting with Country is a strategy that can work for all Australians, regardless of their heritage? Explain your thinking.

Prejudice, ignorance and bystander action

In Chapter 4 there is a discussion about Aboriginal history in which Matilda makes a racist comment, in a "direct and ignorant" way that Phoebe had never experienced before (p. 71).

Later in the book, Matilda makes a comment about Phoebe not feeling the cold, relating it to her Aboriginality (p. 311), to which Phoebe snaps and retaliates physically.

Both times, Phoebe's teacher and classmates condemn the ignorant and hurtful remarks.

- What action does the teacher and school take to address Matilda's comments? Do you feel this is effective?

- What actions do the other students take to support Phoebe? Do you feel they should have done more to intervene?
- Have you ever been in a situation where a rude, ignorant, or discriminatory comment has been made in class and you've felt uncomfortable? (E.g. racist, sexist, homophobic, etc). How did you feel? Did you speak up against it?
- 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?
- Matilda later thanks Phoebe for her presentation about Aboriginal rights and connection to Country, saying "I'm learning stuff" (pp. 336-337). Phoebe makes amends for pushing her and pulling her hair and says that in future she is going to tell Matilda directly if she does something hurtful, and they agree. This reinforces for Phoebe what her father tells her, that "talking and education was the key to better understanding" (p. 337). Do you agree with Phoebe's father? What happens when people don't – or won't – learn and change their ways? Are these things a good reason to continue and increase talking and educating?

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.

Choices and challenges – A character analysis

Phoebe gains a better understanding of her dad and mum's perspectives as she reflects more and more about where they are coming from. When her mother moves out of the family home and back with Nana, and has lost her licence, Phoebe starts to realise how hard her dad had tried to keep the family together in spite of mum's erratic and unreliable behaviour (p. 205).

Then, at Caroline's party, she experiments with drinking, and for a moment she understands why her mum enjoys the carefree feeling, until it leads to something bad, like getting sick, and her hangover the next day:

'I liked it when I first felt the sensation, the warming inside of me. I started to feel floaty and confident, and I forgot about the bad things for a while. But then—' I paused and shuddered. 'Everything turned sour'. (p.240).

In Chapter 14, Phoebe reflects on why her mum's drinking would be dad's "worst nightmare" (p. 285).

- Complete a character analysis and comparison of Phoebe's mum and dad (Bronwyn and Mark). Use quotations and evidence from the novel, and include:
 - Their work, their passion
 - Their dreams and goals
 - How they deal with stress and challenges
 - The ways in which they show love for Phoebe
 - How they respond to Phoebe when she challenges them or argues with them
 - What they are drawn to in their new partners, Caitlin and Simon

Cross-curriculum perspective:
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways.

Personal and Social Capability

Social awareness and management.

Ethical Understanding

Understanding ethical concepts and issues

Exploring values, rights and responsibilities.

Intercultural Understanding

Recognising culture and developing respect.

Reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility.

LITERACY

NOTE: 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.

Heritage and culture

Although proud of her heritage, Phoebe is uncertain about sharing it in class. She notices that no one introduces themselves with their cultural background, so she doesn't mention hers (p. 37).

- Why do you think no one discusses their backgrounds when introducing themselves? Why is it different for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?
- Do non-Indigenous people really “have no culture”? (This idea is increasingly being challenged as a way to reinforce ‘white’ as the ‘dominant culture’ by making it invisible and all-encompassing. See Chalabi’s 2018 article in *The Guardian*, [What is white culture exactly?](#); Peggy McIntosh’s [‘White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack’](#); and Damali Ayo’s [‘I can fix it!’](#))
- Although trying to stay quiet on the topic of Aboriginal people and land ownership, Phoebe finds she can’t help herself and starts to join in on the discussion, albeit cautiously:

I was a bit cautious because in my experience there was always some know-it-all in my class who wanted to tell me all about Aboriginal people when I mentioned my ancestry. (p. 71)

What do you think she is referring to when she discusses her past experiences? Why do you think she is reluctant to share her identity in a room of non-Aboriginal people?

- Phoebe wishes she was back at Wattleside High with the Aboriginal Student Room and the support of other Aboriginal students and teachers. She remembers the artwork, articles, posters and artefacts that showcased successful Aboriginal community members (p. 73). Why do you think such a room is a source of support for Aboriginal students? Is it important for all schools to have one? Are there other ways in which this support could be shown?
- Phoebe feels her heart racing when the teacher raises challenging topics about stereotypes of Aboriginal people (p. 93). What do you think she is afraid of? What might she be anticipating will happen?
- Phoebe talks with her nanna and pop about being the only Aboriginal student at the school: they have some perspectives to share that give her strength (p. 108). Have you ever considered what it might be like to be the only person of your cultural group, gender or sexuality in a school or workplace? Have you experienced this yourself? What are the challenges in this scenario?
- Examine one of the minor characters who support Phoebe, such as Caitlin or Caroline. How do their actions through the novel reveal them to be more valuable allies to Phoebe than she may have initially thought?

Extension activity: Prepare a short persuasive speech on the topic of identity and judging others, considering the statement that “We should never assume to know who a person is, or isn’t.” Use examples from the novel, such as those discussed above in questions 1-2. Present to the class live or via vlog or other multimodal text.

Texts in context

Year 8, 9, 10: Use organisation patterns, voice and language conventions to present a point of view on a subject, speaking clearly, coherently and with effect, using logic, imagery and rhetorical devices to engage audiences.

Use comprehension strategies to compare and contrast information within and between texts, identifying and analysing embedded perspectives, and evaluating supporting evidence.

Create sustained texts, including texts that combine specific digital or media content, for imaginative, informative, or persuasive purposes that reflect upon challenging and complex issues;

Use a range of software, including word processing programs, confidently, flexibly and imaginatively to create, edit and publish texts, considering the identified purpose and the characteristics of the user.

Year 9-10: Review, edit and refine students’ own and others’ texts for control of content, organisation, sentence structure, vocabulary, and/or visual features to achieve particular purposes and effects.

General capabilities

Intercultural Understanding.

Recognising culture and developing respect.

Reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility.

LANGUAGE



Descriptive language

The novel contains some beautiful descriptions of basketball games, for example on pages 84-86.

- Analyse the descriptions of actions, Jamie's appearance, and descriptions of the setting in this scene.

Literary devices

- Discuss the literary devices used in these two scenarios when Phoebe describes how she experiences life with her mum:

Irritated, I started clearing the table and running the sink to wash the dishes. I was hoping that I could also wash the disappointment off of me. (p. 198).

It would have been great just to be able to tell Jane, 'Sure, I'll come. I don't think there'll be any chaos tomorrow...' But I couldn't trust mum to do anything. (p. 201).

- The novel includes vivid descriptions of how Phoebe feels emotionally and physically when she is suffering from stress and anxiety (p.162, pp. 220-221, p. 310, p. 335). Analyse the literary devices used in these descriptions. How do these descriptions assist the reader to understand that what Phoebe is dealing with cannot be easily 'shaken off' or ignored?
- Phoebe learns to allocate a part of her heart to her mother and choose when to open up and when to stay closed off in order to protect herself from being hurt. Discuss the metaphor of the 'spare heart' as described on p. 52, p. 359, p. 370. How does this empower Phoebe?

Texts in context

Years 8, 9 and 10:
Compare the purposes, text structures and language features of traditional and contemporary texts in different media.

Understand how paragraphs and images can be arranged for different purposes, audiences, perspectives and stylistic effects.

ENGLISH ASSESSMENTS

- 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.
- Text transformation: rewrite Chapter 9, from p. 165 up to p. 168, "My chest felt tight, in a good way, thinking about him". Maintain the concept of the main character becoming interested in someone, and achieving a goal. Change the setting and topic and characters from the basketball try-outs with Caroline, Hayley and Ashley to a different setting and characters. Include descriptive and figurative language to demonstrate narrative writing skills.
- Write a poem or song lyrics as if you are the character of Phoebe, about the disappointments and setbacks you have had with your mum and with facing racism, and how you have overcome these challenges. You may wish to use ideas from the novel, such as connection to Country, Patty Mills and Mabo, 'my spare heart' and keeping promises to yourself even when others don't keep theirs. Write a 200-word rationale to explain your language choices in the poem/lyrics.
- Compile a 'Hall of Fame' magazine article outlining 6-8 contemporary famous Indigenous Australian sportspeople, artists, bands/singers who have taken social action to fight for justice and equality. Outline the years they have worked, the work they have done and key quotes/important things they have said. Examples include: Adam Briggs, Adam Goodes, Archie Roach, Rachel Perkins, Larissa Behrendt, Eddie Betts, Jonathan Thurston, Cathy Freeman, Nakkiah Lui, Stephen Oliver, Deborah Mailman, Leah Purcell.

- Discussion essay: Phoebe’s father teaches her that when it comes to combating racism, “talking and education was the key to better understanding” (p. 337). Agree or disagree with the statement, using evidence from the novel as well as any non-fiction sources of your choice.
- Complete a collage/artwork representing Phoebe’s growth across the novel, as she learns to manage her anxiety, deal with her mother’s alcoholism, face racism and build her confidence. Write a 200-word rationale to explain your creative choices and how they relate to the themes of the novel.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH



Phoebe’s changing relationship with her mother

- Phoebe learns through her therapy to protect herself and set boundaries for both herself and her mother in order to avoid feeling disappointed and hurt. Discuss the skills Phoebe uses (outlined in the examples below) to approach the challenges she has with her mother:
 - In Chapter 13, Phoebe draws a line with her mother when she is in hospital after a basketball accident. She is firm with her mother when outlining that she had let Phoebe down, pointing out that her ‘step-mum’ Caitlin flew all the way back from New Zealand to care for her and her mother had been absent.
 - In Chapter 15, after sending her mother to hospital drunk and injured, she chooses not to go to the hospital and then calls her dad the next morning to go home, withdrawing herself from the situation.
 - In Chapters 17-18, she discusses some of her new strategies: using physical activity, such as yoga, to feel good; learning to keep promises to herself even if others can’t keep their promises; accepting what can’t be changed; living in the moment and being grateful when good things happen with her mum; accepting when her mum isn’t well, that she really is not well, no matter how ‘self-inflicted’ or ‘self-indulgent’ it may seem.

Questioning

Critiquing the appropriateness and effectiveness of help and support services available for young people in the local community.

Examine the impact of changes and transitions on relationships.

Researching

Plan, rehearse and evaluate options (including CPR and first aid) for managing situations where their own or others’ health, safety and wellbeing may be at short or long term risk.

Analysing

Analysing how societal norms, stereotypes and expectations influence the way young people think about their bodies, abilities, gender, sexuality, food, physical activity, sexual health, drugs and/or risk-taking behaviours.

Analysing the role of family, friends and community in supporting an individual’s identities, and proposing strategies to enhance their own and others’ wellbeing.

Evaluating and reflecting

Evaluate factors that shape identities and critically analyse how individuals impact the identities of others.

The party incident at Caroline’s

In Chapter 12, Phoebe goes to Caroline’s house where Caroline’s brother is going to be hosting a party. Caroline’s parents routinely have friends around and drink a lot of alcohol, so they deliberately ignore the teens drinking:

Dad and Mum will drink tonight and if we’re drinking too they won’t feel so guilty about it. (p. 225).

Caroline offers Phoebe wine and marijuana and, not wanting to seem boring, Phoebe participates, even though she resisted last time she was at Caroline’s and no one pressured her. She seems to feel pressure to participate this time, possibly in part due to her ‘crush’ on Trent.

Discuss the questions below with the class in response to this scenario.

- Discuss why Phoebe feels she has to drink and smoke with Caroline, considering how societal norms could be influencing her expectations of herself and how she should act.

Communicating

Proposing and practising a range of realistic responses to scenarios where peers are encouraging them to take unnecessary risks.

Planning and practising responses to emergencies where they may be required to administer first aid to a friend, including CPR.

Practising skills to deal with challenging or unsafe situations, such as refusal skills, communicating choices, expressing opinions and initiating contingency plans.

- Consider how Caroline’s parents’ lifestyle may influence Caroline and her friends, modelling binge-drinking behaviour, which is very common in Australian society. Discuss the double-standards Phoebe is seeing – the routine binge-drinking of adults in the community versus the problematic alcoholism of Phoebe’s mother. What is the difference? Where is the line between social drinking and alcoholism? (Note Phoebe defines alcoholism as “she has a problem with alcohol”, p. 354, which is a fairly broad definition).
- Discuss how Caroline, and later Trent’s mum (p. 322) respond to Phoebe’s admission of Trent’s assault. They immediately believe her, sympathise, show support, reassure her that it is not her fault. Trent’s mum is calm and level-headed in her response.

Discuss how many other different scenarios could have emerged here: consider the recent media coverage around rape culture, victim-blaming and diminishing of sexual assault crimes. Also notice the way in which Phoebe explains the incident, without making too many excuses to diminish Trent’s responsibility or to apologise for her own behaviour:

And about a month ago, he forced himself on me too. I mean, I really liked him and maybe I wanted to kiss him, but then he tried touching me. I told him to stop and he just kept going. (pp. 321-2).

She doesn’t mention that she was drinking, or that she was wearing inviting clothing: she is clear and confident in stating his wrongdoing without making excuses for him or blaming herself.

Extension task: Working in groups, rewrite the section or create a play script and performance to explore the ways in which this scenario could have played out differently. Prompt cards could be provided, or a class brainstorm held, to ensure that each group takes the scene from a different angle.

- Phoebe’s use of alcohol makes her sick, needing Jamie and his mum’s help to get well. Phoebe’s mum had earlier turned up at Katie’s house drunk and injured from a physical fight with her boyfriend, and they called the ambulance despite her mum’s protests (p. 303). Discuss ‘party safe’ strategies and the best course of action when concerned about someone’s wellbeing when they have been drinking or taking drugs – how friends can help each other, what happens when the ambulance is called, how to avoid getting into situations where you are vulnerable.

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:

- Highlight the comment from Phoebe’s teacher that Aboriginal people are **more likely to abstain from alcohol** than non-Aboriginal Australians, but due to homelessness or discomfort drinking with non-Aboriginal people in bars and clubs, those who do drink often drink in public/open settings that highlight their drinking, such as in a park (p. 95).

- Encourage students to reflect on alcohol abuse as a broader Australian health issue rather than only an Indigenous health issue, and to consider why many of the stereotypes and public opinion see it as only an Indigenous problem.
- Link back to the novel, considering Phoebe’s dad’s perspective – the abuse of alcohol he has witnessed in the past, the reasons why some people drink in order to deal with pain and trauma, and the fact that due to this past, his parents (Nanna and Poppa) abstain and he drinks very moderately (pp. 283-285).
- 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.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

HISTORY, CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP



Jigsaw and gallery walk activity about civil rights activists

Phoebe, her teacher and her father refer to a range of significant people who have contributed to ongoing efforts to improve First Nations peoples’ rights, freedoms and living conditions:

- Mick Dodson
 - Eddie Mabo
 - Baker Boy
 - Patty Mills
 - Midnight Oil
- Students can research each of these in relation to their contribution to civil rights activism and share with the class. This could be divided up among groups of students in a **jigsaw activity**: students have an initial ‘home group’ of five members, who disband to re-form five ‘working groups’. The working group completes and shares the research about their topic and creates a poster display/timeline or infographic.
 - The students then return to their home groups and move around the room on a **‘gallery walk’** tour of the displays. At each display, the ‘expert’ in the group who had been on that display’s working group explains the research displayed. At this point, the teacher may have some note-taking scaffolds to support key information being recorded.

Global rights movements

Phoebe refers to other people of colour Internationally:

- A Tribe Called Quest (seminal intellectual hip hop group commenting on a range of social issues concerning race and gender stereotypes and inequality)
- LeBron James (social justice activist, leading the movement to kneel during the National Anthem before a game to protest against the George Floyd murder)
- Michael Jordan (who, after retirement, has donated significant funds to social activist organisations, while not claiming to be an activist himself)

History

Making a Nation

Year 9: The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Rights and Freedoms

Year 10: Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations.

The continuing nature of efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

Civics and Citizenship

Year 9: The influence of a range of media, including social media, in shaping identities and attitudes to diversity.

Year 10: The role of the High Court, including in interpreting the Constitution, exploring the Mabo decision as an example.

How Australia’s international legal obligations shape Australian law and government policies, including in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

- Students can research examples of how civil rights leaders and anti-racism movements in other countries might connect to First Nations Australians, for example, the recent Black Lives Matter movement sparked by the unlawful killing of an African American man by a policeman in America (George Floyd case, 2020). Students can present their findings in the form of an opinion article in the style of *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

Dr Jared Thomas is a Nukunu person of the Southern Flinders Ranges, William and Margaret Geary Research Fellow, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Material Culture and Art at the South Australian Museum and the University of South Australia, and an Indigenous Literacy Foundation ambassador.

He is the highly regarded author of critically acclaimed books for young adults including *Sweet Guy*, which was short-listed for both the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature, and *Calypso Summer*, for which Jared was awarded the Kuril Dhagun Indigenous Writing Fellowship, and which was selected by the International Youth Library as a White Raven Book and short-listed for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Indigenous Writing.

Jared is also the author of the YA novel *Songs that Sound Like Blood*, and the co-author of the Patty Mills series *Game Day*.

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THESE 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, Mount Nathan, in the Gold Coast hinterland.

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, by First Nations authors:

Becoming Kirrali Lewis by Jane Harrison with [unit of work](#) by Reading Australia

Grace Beside Me by Sue McPherson with [unit of work](#) by Reading Australia

Swallow the Air by Tara June Winch with [unit of work](#) by Reading Australia

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

A documentary by Wadi Rum Films about the search for happiness:

Happy – mentioned on p. 176 and how to cultivate it. With [teachers' notes](#).

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.

<https://curriculumconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/sovereign-stories>

Common Ground, First Nations published website with resources and explainers on key topics such as land rights and Connection to Country. <https://www.commonground.org.au/>

National Museum of Australia: rights and freedoms digital resource and civil rights timeline.

<https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/learning-modules/rights-and-freedoms-defining-moments-1945-present> and <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/indigenous-rights/timeline>.

Mabo online exhibition by Screen Australia. <https://mabonativetitle.com/>

ONLINE LINKS

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. https://www.hardiegrant.com/au/publishing/bookfinder/book/marcia-langton_-welcome-to-country-schools-edition-by-marcia-langton/9781741176667

Black Words Historical Events Calendar: Outline of key events in colonial history from a First Nations standpoint, published by AustLit: <https://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/5960630>

National Museum of Australia resource 'Aborigines Protection Act', on the Stolen Generations and Bringing Them Home report. <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/aborigines-protection-act>

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. <https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/connection-to-animals-and-country>

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.

http://www.workingwithindigenoustralian.info/content/History_1_AUSTRALIA.html

The Gumbay First Languages Map published by First Languages Australia as part of the Australian Government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program. <https://gumbay.com.au/>

Aboriginal Languages Map – The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>

State Library of Queensland, 'Big Yarns' blog series. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEtaLNmqspk>

Human Rights Commission 'It stops with me' campaign:
<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/bystander-action>

'What is white culture exactly? Here's what the stats say' by M. Chalabi (from theguardian.com).
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/26/white-culture-statistics-vegetables-alcohol>

'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack' by P. McIntosh. First appeared in *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, July/August, 1989, pp. 10-12, a publication of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Philadelphia, PA. Reproduced by University of Washington:
<https://admin.artsci.washington.edu/sites/adming/files/unpacking-invisible-knapsack.pdf>

'I Can Fix It!: A 'Now Art' Project' by Damali Ayo. From *Racism*, Volume 1. Reproduced by University of Washington: https://www.damaliayo.com/pdfs/I%20CAN%20FIX%20IT_racism.pdf