

These notes are for:

- Upper Primary / Secondary
- 10+yrs old

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Geography

Example of:

- Junior/YA Fiction
- Novel

Experience of:

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening & Speaking
- Viewing

Themes:

- Survival
- Courage
- Environment
- Perseverance
- Bildungsroman
- Bushfires
- Identity & family
- Belonging & isolation

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia Ph +61 2 9517 9577
 Locked Bag 22 Fax +61 2 9517 9997
 Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

For enquiries please contact Melissa Hamilton:
 mhamilton@walkerbooks.com.au

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Get a Grip, Cooper Jones



Get a Grip, Cooper Jones

By: Sue Whiting
 ISBN: 9781921529788
 ARRP: \$15.95
 NZRRP: \$17.99
 No. of Pages: 206
 August 2010

Outline:

What do you do when life's spinning out of control?

Cooper Jones wishes his life was simple – like it used to be. When all he needed to worry about was whether to get up for swim training or to sleep in.

Suddenly, his life's become complicated. Cooper can't stop thinking about his dad – a man he has never known – and now Mum's starting to act weird too.

When the gorgeous Abbie arrives in town, Cooper realises that he's not the only one whose life is complicated.

With tensions growing and bushfires threatening, Cooper needs to get a grip – fast.

Author Information:

After developing a passion for children's literature as a primary school teacher, **Sue Whiting** now works full-time in the field she loves, dividing her time between working as a children's book editor and writing stories for young people. Sue has had almost sixty children's books published, ranging from rhyming romping verse for the very young to novels for pre-teens. For more information about the author, please visit her website: www.suewhiting.com

Other titles by Sue Whiting published by Walker Books include the picture book *The Firefighters* (illus. by Donna Rawlins) and *Freaky* in the popular junior fiction series *Lightning Strikes*.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

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**Classroom Ideas for *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*:*****About these notes:***

The questions below are designed for students to use with a close reading of *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*. After reading each chapter students are invited to answer questions about the chapter and to develop their knowledge of the themes and subject matter. Alternatively these questions can be explored together in class.

Before reading the text

- View the front cover. Write a description of the boy on the front cover. Include information about his personality, age and where you think he might live.
- Using only the front cover and the blurb discuss what you think this story is about. Who might Cooper Jones be? What does “get a grip” mean? What age do you think the intended audience for this book is?
- The tagline for the book is “What do you do when life’s spinning out of control?”. Have you ever felt like your life is spinning out of control? What do you think you should do if you feel this way?
- Before reading the book write down some questions that you would like answered. E.g. Where is the beach on the front cover? Why is there a boy standing on it? Who is Abbie? Is this story in the first, second or third person?

Chapters 1-3

- Cooper’s mum remarks on the cicadas and that the day is “going to be a scorcher”. What sounds remind you of summer? Write a list of these.
- From the description in Chapter 3, draw a bird’s-eye view of Wangaroo Bay. Mark on this view where you think Cooper’s house is. As you read the story mark other features on your map.
- After reading these chapters identify the following:
 - Who are the main characters?
 - Who is the protagonist and what do you already know about him?
 - What are the problems that the protagonist is facing?
 - Where is this story set?

Chapters 4-6

- On page 34 Cooper’s mum asks Abeba a lot of questions. Are there any questions that you would like to ask Abeba or the other characters? Think of up to three questions for each of the following characters: Cooper’s mum, Cooper, Gilmore and Abeba. As you read the story mark down if/when these questions are answered.
- Create a poster advertising The Brown’s Cows Women’s Circus.
- While reading these three chapters write down quotes from the text where Cooper’s size is referred to. How many times is it mentioned? How, as readers, do we know that this is important to the story and the characters?
- Where do you get your characteristics and mannerisms from? Do you look the same as your parents? Do you share certain traits with them? What are these?

Classroom Ideas for *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*:

Chapters 7-9

- Read the opening sentence of Chapter 7. "The early-morning sun, slanting through the ghost gums, casts zebra stripes of light then dark, light then dark across my face." Make your own observation about the world around you and mimicking Sue Whiting's writing style, create your own sentence to describe what you see.
- What does Cooper lie to Abeba about? Why would he do this? Does it matter when he comes clean?
- What is the embarrassment that Abeba suffers? Is she treated fairly? Why/why not?

Chapters 10-12

- How could Cooper growing up cause problems for his mother? What does she think about men? Do you think this could change her view of her son? Write down your thoughts.
- What is the story that Abeba and Cooper bond over?
- Research shark attacks. Are these common on Australian beaches?
- Draw a picture of the Feral Tree. The Feral Tree is Cooper's "special place" where he likes to hang out and think about things. Do you have a "thinking place"? Draw a picture of this.

Chapters 13-15

- Cooper feels he is a constant loser. Why do you think he feels this way? Do you think he is a "dumb loser"? Why? Why not?
- What does the expression "like father, like son" mean? How does it relate to the story? How does it relate to these other phrases? Can you think of any more? E.g. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree; A chip off the old block.
- Why is Cooper angry with his mum? Is his anger justified? Why/why not? Why is Abeba angry with her mum? Is her anger justified? Why/why not?
- Abeba knows a lot of facts about Ethiopia. Research Ethiopia and create a fact file on this country. Make a similar fact file for Australia. How are these countries similar/different?

Chapters 16-18

- Cooper's dad has never figured in his life. Why do you think Cooper needs to know about his father? Why is it suddenly so important?
- What are the four "favourite expressions" that Cooper thinks of at the end of Chapter 16? Do you or your friends/family have any favourite expressions? Create a list of some of these to share with the class.
- Write a newspaper report on the Brownsford bush fire.
- What is the role of the Rural Fire Service. Research this organisation and provide a report on them.

Classroom Ideas for *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*:***Chapters 19-21***

- View a satellite image of the New South Wales South Coast (use Google Maps). Compare and contrast this image to a more densely populated area such as Sydney. What do you notice about the South Coast environment that would make it susceptible to bush fires.
- Why is Abeba angry about the blog? How can the internet be an invasion of privacy? What do you feel should/shoudn't be published on the internet? Why/why not?
- Abeba's mother kept her real name from her, and Cooper's mother kept the name of his father from him. What is so important about a name? Do names add to the identity of a person? Why?

Chapters 22-24

- Page 173: "The orange glow towers above the tree line, like a fiery screaming skyscraper ..."
This is a simile. Come up with another simile to describe fire.
- The brown snake is one of the deadliest snakes in the world. Write an information report on the brown snake.
- Cooper has a fear of the sea. Why? What do you have a fear of? How do you feel when you are confronted with your fear?
- There are many descriptions of the water and the sea in this section of the book. Write your own description of the sea.

Chapters 25-28

- Is Cooper a hero? Why/why not? What's the definition of a heroic deed? Write down your thoughts.
- How does Chapter 28 finish the story? Write some of the conversation you might expect Cooper and his mum to have.

Further questions: Writing

- Like many authors, Sue Whiting has drawn on her own experiences and life to write this novel. The Feral Tree is a real tree discovered (and named) by her son and his mates during a bushwalk on his 8th birthday. Sue Whiting has used the Feral Tree as Cooper's special place.
- Pretend you have just arrived at your special place. What can you see? Hear? Taste? Feel? Smell? Write a description drawing on as many of the senses as you can.

Further questions: Family, Friendship & Identity

- Who are you close to in your family? What characteristics do you share with them and how have they helped to shape your identity? Who are the main influences in your life?
- Write an article about the importance of friendship and families, and the positive/negative effects they can have on a person's identity.

Classroom Ideas for *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*:

Further questions: Symbolism – fire & water

- As you read the story use the following table to list the growing tension in the atmosphere, and also between the characters. How does the tension change with the symbols of fire/heat and water/cool? Create a list of quotes from the chapters that show how these symbols are used. A few have already been done for you below. You may need to add more rows to continue this throughout the story.

Fire/Heat Quote	Reference	Water/Cool Quote	Reference	Current Events
"Listen to those cicadas scream," ... "It's going to be another scorcher."	Chapter 1, page 9.	"Swimming training is one of the few times where I feel in control of things".	Chapter 1, page 11	Returning to swimming training.
"When is this heatwave going to rack off?"	Chapter 5, page 44.	"Maybe I'll get an ice-cream."	Chapter 5, page 45.	Mum is making "narky" comments towards Cooper and not talking to him.
"Reckons we're gonna burn, for sure."	Chapter 7, page 57.	"... the swim seems to have improved her mood."	Chapter 7, page 58.	
"There's a strong westerly chopping up the water".		"The water is still and turquoise and crystal clear, and the wind is only a memory."		

After Reading

- After reading *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones* write a review of the book, paying special attention to the themes and issues that it raises.
- To extend the book report, research the author. Visit Sue Whiting's website – www.suewhiting.com – and read the information below.



Sue Whiting on writing *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*

"I first started thinking about this story when I came across a very silly joke book about 'men'. The book was filled with jokes like: 'What's the difference between a man and a piece of cheese?' Cheese matures. And 'Why are men like snot?' They get up your nose. As I flicked through the book, I started to wonder what it would be like for a young boy to grow up in a household with a mum who felt this way about men. That boy became Cooper Jones. The story has changed enormously from this early idea. Once I placed Cooper and his mum in Wangaroo Bay, one hot and bushfire-filled summer, Cooper told me a different story to the one I intended to write. (Those pesky characters sometimes have a mind of their own!) But it was the joke book that started it all off."

What do you do when life's spinning out of control?

Dear Educators,

It is my great pleasure to introduce my new novel, *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*, for readers aged 10–14.

Set in an isolated “surfie” town wedged between the sea and the rugged escarpment, during one sizzling summer, *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones* is a story about friendship and families; about fighting fires and facing fears; about growing up and finding where you fit. It's a contemporary story, told through the eyes of thirteen-year-old Cooper Jones with his sometimes humorous and frequently misguided take on things, as he tackles some of life's trickier questions. What makes me, me? What kind of person am I? What if I don't really like the person I think I am?

Adolescence is probably one of the most intense periods of our lives – emotionally charged, with hormones on the rampage and minds and bodies changing. It can be exciting one moment, confusing to the extreme the next. There is a sense that a whole new world is beckoning, but at the same time there are many doubts and insecurities.

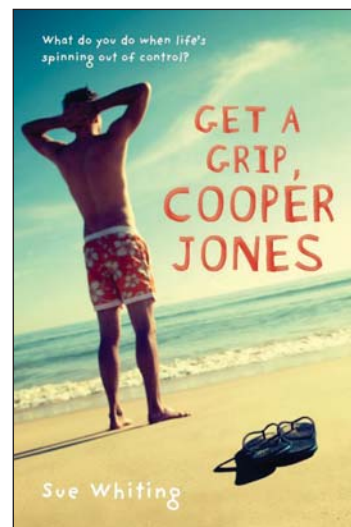
In *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*, Cooper, and also Abbie, the gorgeous newcomer to Wangaroo Bay, are both trying to navigate through this challenging period. A period made all the more difficult for Cooper and Abbie because of their particular circumstances. For Cooper it is his absent father – a man he knows nothing about; for the adopted Abbie, it is her lack of understanding of her birth culture.

Story is a wonderful escape. It is also a powerful tool. It takes us on a journey: a journey that helps us to understand the human experience; to discover a different reality; a journey that allows us to feel and explore and wonder. It is my sincere hope that readers will find new friends in Cooper and Abbie, and that they will be keen to hang out with them for a while. And as tensions increase and bushfires threaten, and Cooper's life seems to be spinning out of control, they will be there, shouting – yelling – at Cooper, telling him he had better get a grip – and fast. After all, Abbie's survival depends on it.

Thank you for your interest in *Get a Grip, Cooper Jones*. I hope I have enticed you to take a peek ...

Regards

Sue Whiting



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by Sue Whiting
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Themes

- identity
- family
- friendship
- bushfires
- survival
- courage
- beach
- coming-of-age
- adoption
- Australia
- Ethiopia