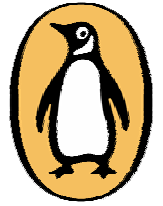


Teachers' Notes written by Donna Mulazzani



# *Jarvis 24*

## by David Metzenthen

YEAR 9-10

### Background

*'I know that the choices people make hopefully lead to something better. But it's also true that some things that you have no choice about can change your life.'*  
(p161)

Whilst there are many texts that focus on the challenges of adolescence, very few offer such a candid male voice as David Metzenthen's *Jarvis 24*. Set in suburban Melbourne, the text offers a brief insight to the complicated life of Marc Jarvis – a young man struggling to make sense of who he is in the ever changing world around him. Showing considerable insight and resilience, Marc learns the importance of being true to oneself and that genuine friends can offer great support.

Whilst *Jarvis 24* is a shift from Metzenthen's more recent works of historical fiction, he maintains his focus on how the work force, and the relationships formed within this working environment, can help to enrich the lives of his characters.

### Objectives

To engage with the following VELS statements:

*Students read, view, analyse, critique, reflect on and discuss contemporary and classical imaginative texts that explore personal, social, cultural and political issues of significance to their own lives...*

*They explain how texts are shaped by the time, place and cultural setting in which they are created.*

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) VELS English Domain – Reading, Level 6

*They select subject matter and begin to use a range of language techniques to try to position readers to accept particular views of people, characters, events, ideas and information. They compose a range of other texts, such as feature articles, webpage's and workplace texts.*

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) VELS English Domain – Writing, Level 6

## Focus: Identity

*'I wanted to write about private school kids and preconceived ideas. I wanted to present Marc's world, and the wideness, narrowness, or downright obtuseness of his view. I wanted the story to go off on tangents, to reflect some of the sheer energy and madness of the haphazard process of growing up.'* (Interview with David Metzenthén)

Many recent texts centered on teenage boys are plagued with angry and violent characters. However, part of what defines Marc 'Jarvy' Jarvis is that he is a good friend, has a positive relationship with his family and is a legitimately likeable young man. He is simply a person grappling with his own identity; trying to define who he is and how others see him.

*'I also worry, when I have time, that I don't know as many girls as I should; although what would be an acceptable number of girls to know would be hard to say. I also worry, now and again – perhaps because I often find myself comparing myself to other guys, their clothes and physiques – that I might be a bit gay. Might I be?'* (p.4)

Sexuality and sexual preference are pivotal characteristics by which adolescents define themselves, and Marc is certainly no exception. The manner in which he, and his friend Travis, 'catalogue' the young women in which they meet offers a light-hearted perspective on the importance of image and how we are viewed by others. Refreshingly, Metzenthén allows his characters to be drawn to romantic interests who offer more than just physical pleasure.

The burden of gender roles and social expectations also weigh heavily on Metzenthén's protagonists, particularly the boys. Whilst Marc and Travis are both footballers, and are fiercely competitive, they also offer a gentle acceptance of marginalized characters who find themselves on the fringes of society.

- Discuss the defining characteristics and values of manhood. How have they changed over time?

## Focus: Community

*'It was a pleasure to write about Melbourne, kids, football, trams, trains, schools, cars, kissing, flowers, families, houses, and whatever else is contained within Jarvis 24. I hope I did my local suburbs proud; as these are locations that I love, even if they aren't exactly mean streets, although they can be.'* (Interview with David Metzenthén)

The detail in which Metzenthén builds his characters is quintessential to the success of the overall narrative, yet it is their relationships that truly enrich his

stories. Whilst he uses the backdrop of private boys schooling, he is quick to push the boundaries confining the characters by placing them in the unfamiliar realm of Work Experience. Through the setting of a secondhand car yard, offbeat characters are able to come to life and Marc is propelled into an environment that challenges his preconceived ideas about people and the lives that they lead. It is here that Marc meets Mikey, a *'nice guy ... from Queensland ... he's gay'* (p.22), and is introduced to a world of art, kick boxing and dysfunctional families. By embracing this new world Marc becomes a part of this broader community, and with the physical navigation of a familiar city, Metzthen creates a true eastern suburbs experience.

- Consider the time that Marc spends at GateWay Auto.
  - What lessons does Marc learn whilst on Work Experience? Identify specific examples from the text.
  - Discuss the shared values that unite the employees of the car yard.
  - What draws people together and gives them a sense of belonging?
  - Do we have a social responsibility to care for those on the fringes of society?

### **Focus: Love & Loss**

The art of finding love involves risking heartbreak; certainly not something that usually features in a male centered narrative. However, it is Marc's propensity to wear his heart on his sleeve that endears him to readers. He is still struggling to come to terms with the past and the death of his girlfriend Amelia-Anne Sorensen *'who will stay fourteen and three quarters forever'* (p.19) and yet he still has the courage to pursue the affection of a *'beautiful unknown girl'* (p.5). It is with humor and awkward honesty that Marc courts Electra and the trials of their relationship brings hope to the continued existence of young love.

Metzthen does not limit his novel to include only heterosexual love, featuring the gay character of Mikey and the lesbian couple of Immy and Jodie. Whilst these romantic relationships operate on the fringes of the text, it is still important to acknowledge that young love can take many forms, and students should be encouraged to think broadly when discussing the characteristics that attract people to each other.

- Consider the various romantic relationships within the text.
  - Discuss what it is that attracts people to each other.
  - Discuss what is more important, physical appearance or personality? Can we avoid 'judging a book by its cover'?

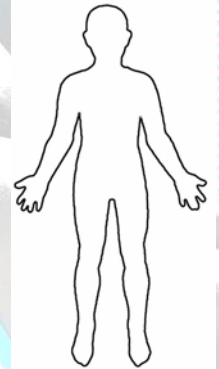
Social networks and the bonds of friendship are pivotal in the adolescent world. The unconditional support offered by his best friend, Travis, and the friends formed at GateWay Auto propel Marc's narrative and empowers him to be a better man. The value of past experience allows Marc to be philosophical about

matters of the heart; he appreciates that life is not always fair. Metz then spares readers from any antiquated perception as to how men deal with romance and grief, presenting all characters with equal sincerity.

### Focus: Characters

Marc Jarvis and his life experiences are central to the action of the text. However, he would not emerge as the young man that he is, without the influence of those around him. The characters of Travis, Mikey, Belinda and Electra each play a pivotal role in helping Marc to make sense of the world around him and the challenges that he faces.

- One of Metz then’s intentions in writing this novel was to focus on preconceived ideas. Consider how each of the protagonists is not always as they appear to be and, in small groups, complete the following activity:
  - Draw a figure like the one illustrated.
  - Your character will have had many private and public thoughts. In the head, write some of these.
  - Draw speech bubbles and write some of the things that your character says.
  - Your character has experienced a variety of emotions. In the chest, write his / her feelings and identify when these feelings have taken place.
  - What are some of the key events that your character has been involved in? In the legs list these events.
  - How do other people see your character? Along either side of your figure, write how other characters see him / her.
  
- Construct a table, similar to the one below, and consider how each of the following characters contributes to Marc’s life.



	Relationship to Marc	Role played in Marc’s experiences	Lessons they teach Marc
Travis			
Mikey			
Belinda			
Electra			

## Assessment

*Jarvis 24* is a novel that is character driven rather than plot focused. In this respects, it lends itself to a more intimate discussion of some of the provocative issues facing adolescents. It is important to provide students with an open forum to discuss some of the more sensitive issues of loss and grief; equipping students with an understanding of the support networks available to them.

To explore the techniques of characterization, students could:

- Construct a newspaper article that highlights Electra's sporting prowess and her journey to the Australian Institute of Sport. This should include those people who have influenced her success.
- Marc and Travis like to catalogue the girls that they meet. Construct a 'catalogue' of all the characters in the novel, highlighting what makes them an attractive romantic interest.
- Create a 'missing' advertisement for someone that you have lost contact with.
- Create a character profile of Marc which focuses on the differences between how he sees himself and how others perceive him.
- Construct an instruction manual that outlines how to sell a secondhand car – this might include advice that Marc receives from Belinda and Mikey.

## Related Reading

*Lost Property* by James Maloney

*48 Shades of Brown* by Nick Earls

*Monica Bloom* by Nick Earls

*Town* by James Roy (short stories)

*Flyboy and the Invisible* by Matt Zurbo

*Who is Jesse Flood?* By Malachy Doyle

DAVID METZENTHEN