



# Wakefield Press

## TEACHERS' NOTES

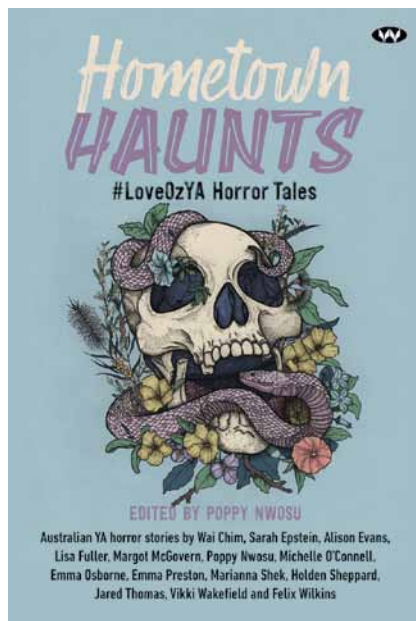
### Hometown Haunts

#### #LoveOzYA Horror Tales

##### Edited by Poppy Nwosu

Contributors are Wai Chim, Sarah Epstein, Alison Evans, Lisa Fuller, Margot McGovern, Poppy Nwosu, Michelle O'Connell, Emma Osborne, Emma Preston, Marianna Shek, Holden Sheppard, Jared Thomas, Vikki Wakefield and Felix Wilkins.

Notes prepared by Poppy Nwosu © 2021



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## 1. Introduction to *Hometown Haunts: #LoveOzYA Horror Tales*

*One bite of an apple from a family shrine unearths hungry ghosts. A poison garden unfurls a polite boy's deepest, darkest desires. Interfering with an Indigenous burial site unleashes ancestral revenge, to a metal soundtrack. An underground dance party during Covid threatens to turn lethal. And on the edge of a coastal rainforest, a grieving sister waits to witness a mysterious 'unravelling'.*

This #LoveOzYA anthology – the first to focus entirely on horror – unites a stellar cast of Australia's finest YA authors with talented new and emerging voices, including two graphic artists.

Contributors are **Wai Chim, Sarah Epstein, Alison Evans, Lisa Fuller, Margot McGovern, Poppy Nwosu, Michelle O'Connell, Emma Osborne, Emma Preston, Marianna Shek, Holden Sheppard, Jared Thomas, Vikki Wakefield** and **Felix Wilkins**.

The stories in this wide-ranging collection dig deep and go hard. While some are straight-up terrifying rollercoaster rides, others are psychologically rooted in our society's deepest fears and concerns: acceptance and fitting in, love and loss, desire and temptation, and the terror of a world threatened by catastrophic change ... and even collapse.

From body horror to the supernatural, hauntings to transformations, and the everyday evil of humans to menacing outside forces, *Hometown Haunts* will have you glued to your chair ... until you leap out of it!

## 2. Links to curriculum

These Teachers' Notes have been designed with the aim of encouraging students to engage more closely with *Hometown Haunts* to promote emotional intelligence, critical interpretation, awareness of social issues and a deeper understanding of using the English language for creative writing purposes.

The suggested questions and activities will encourage students to think critically and creatively, and to promote interpretation of meaning and themes behind the text. Additionally, students can examine each story's style, voice and point of view, with questions that encourage group discussion and communication.

The following sections outline suggested questions to ask students for each story, and activities to be performed to encourage group discussion and class engagement. They have been broken down into sections related to each story, to enable teachers to identify which topics and story most suit their class or teaching style, or alternatively, for one or two questions to be selected from every section.

### Learning Area

*Hometown Haunts* is best studied in secondary years (grades 9 to 12) and can be used to teach all three strands of the Australian English curriculum (Language, Literature and Literacy). It is particularly relevant to investigating how social, moral and ethical positions are represented in texts and also explores interpersonal relationships.

### 3. 'The Party' by Wai Chim

#### About the author:

Wai Chim is the Chinese-American-Australian author of a number of children's and YA titles, including the award-winning *The Surprising Power of a Good Dumpling*. Born and raised in New York, Wai now lives in Sydney with her husband and beloved cat, Freddie. She recently appeared as a contestant on Australian Survivor.!

#### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'My inspiration for writing this story boils down to: *'2020 was the absolute pits. How could I make it worse?'* During such a difficult time, music and a strong online community helped carry me through what was really a creative black hole. 'The Party' is written as a homage and gentle nod to ARMY – I hope fans and non-fans alike will appreciate the final reveal.' — **Wai Chim**

#### Questions:

- How would you describe the relationships in this family, between Toby and his brother, Matt? Between Toby and his parents? Between the parents and Matt?
- The story is set in 2020 during Melbourne lockdown – what are some of the ways the author has let us know this is the backdrop for the story?
- We are introduced to the character Jin. As a reader, what are your first impressions of Jin? Compare those to what you think Toby's first impressions of Jin are.
- The story ends with the boys finding a newspaper headline which comes as a complete surprise to them. As the reader, you were probably less surprised by this reveal. What are some ways the author foreshadowed this conclusion?
- Without explicitly mentioning the group, the author wrote this story as a gentle nod to K-pop group BTS. How would being a fan of the same band impact the way you read and interpreted the story?

#### Activities:

- What would be different about the story if it were set in a different year, such as 2019 or 2021? Rewrite the scenes and dialogue that would change.
- Toby and Matt are clearly quite clueless about who is in the house with them. How would the story be different if either of them knew or suspected the truth earlier? Write a scene with this new point of view.
- Pretend you're a journalist writing an article on the group's disappearance. Write a follow-up piece based on the events that happened in the story.

#### Related reading / resources:

- *The Surprising Power of a Good Dumpling* by Wai Chim
- *Freedom Swimmer* by Wai Chim
- *Shaozhen* by Wai Chim

## 4. 'Seek and Destroy' by Jared Thomas

### About the author:

Dr Jared Thomas is a Nukunu person of the Southern Flinders Ranges and the Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Material Culture at the South Australian Museum, and an international award-winning author.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

"Seek and Destroy" was inspired by my love of the song 'Seek and Destroy' by the band Metallica and the story is basically a conglomeration of the type of stories my friends and I continue to tell each other when we're sitting around the fire. The idea for the story began with thinking about the tent scene. A friend and I shared a tent with a non-Aboriginal kid on school camp in grade 5 and we told him stories like the one about Georgie Barnes, featured in 'Seek and Destroy'. Consequently I slept with one eye open that night.

The country holds spirits and we need to be careful not to disturb them.' — **Jared Thomas**

### Questions:

- The author is an Aboriginal man. Why do you think he has chosen to write this story from the perspective of a non-Indigenous character?
- After reading 'Seek and Destroy', what issues and values do you think are important to the author?
- What is the author trying to communicate through the range of Aboriginal characters portrayed in the story?
- How does the author build the connection between the central character and his grandfather throughout the story?
- The song 'Seek and Destroy' by Metallica inspired and is part of the short story. What song would you select to inspire a short horror story, and how would the song feature in the story?
- If the story were to be adapted into a short film, what would be the tone of the film? How would you expand the story if you were going to make it a feature length film?

### Activities:

- Research Aboriginal Cultural Heritage policy in your state or territory and consider how the policies may be applied within a particular profession, such as construction or mining.
- Research Jared Thomas and discuss some of his other work. What are some of the common themes in Jared's writing and professional life?
- Consider cultural figures in your own cultural setting and consider how they may be applied in a present scenario to propel a horror story.
- Consider a place that is important to you and write about its destruction, communicating through a character how you would feel about its destruction.

### Related reading / resources:

- *Songs That Sound Like Blood* by Jared Thomas
- *Calypso Summer* by Jared Thomas

## 5. 'It's Quiet Now' by Emma Preston

### **About the author:**

Emma Preston is an aspiring illustrator. She has completed her Bachelor of Design (Illustration Animation) and is currently working on illustrating children's books. Emma lives on the Fleurieu Peninsula and uses the landscape around her to inspire her works, including her graphic novel 'It's Quiet Now'.

### **Author's inspiration behind the story:**

'The beginning of the year 2020's quarantine was a weird time for everyone. During this time, I was at university and still had classes to attend before the full quarantine. I remember walking around the city. It was quiet, and no one was around. But I still felt like I was being watched. It reminded me of when me and my family went camping out in the Flinders Ranges, which became the inspiration for this story.

As the quarantine begins, the cities grow silent.

Monsters who fear noise take solitude within the unpopulated areas of the Australian outback. But when people start to quarantine, and cities and residential areas become quiet, these curious monsters decide to do some investigating. When the quarantine ends, however, streets become bustling once more and the monsters take refuge in alleyways.

Most leave, deciding that the noise is too much to bear. But some stay, having adapted to their new existence.'

— **Emma Preston**

### **Questions:**

- What are the motivations of the shadow monsters?
- What are the main themes of the story?
- What does the texture and line work add to the story?
- Why do you think that the author choose not to use any speech/dialogue throughout the story?
- What about the story does the title describe?

### **Activites:**

- Design your own shadow monster (drawing activity).
- Write a short paragraph describing the life led by one of the shadow monsters after they stayed behind.
- Summarise 'It's Quiet Now' in your own words.

## 6. 'Heart-shaped Stone' by Vikki Wakefield

### About the author:

Vikki Wakefield lives and writes in Adelaide. Her works include award-winning novels *All I Ever Wanted*, *Friday Brown*, *Inbetween Days* and *Ballad for a Mad Girl*, and her latest novel *This Is How We Change the Ending* was awarded the 2020 CBCA Book of the Year, Older Readers.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'My love for horror began in my early teens, reading Jackson, Poe, Lovecraft, King and Barker, turning the pages by torchlight. I carry vivid images of creepy settings – the Moors, the dank streets of London, abandoned estates and sinister small towns – but none were as terrifying as my own suburban backyard. As kids we would explore a series of deep interconnected gullies, crawling through filthy stormwater pipes and drains, but we avoided one place: a large granite slab, stained with blood and scattered with bones, leading to a crevice in the hillside. According to legend, offer a sacrifice and you were granted a wish, but ask too much and you might wake missing a tooth or a toe. I still live in the area. The crevice has grown wider; the slab is still blackened with blood and littered with bones. Feral foxes? Kids like us, carrying on a decades-old urban legend? Or an ancient entity, trapped by creeping suburbia?

'Heart-shaped Stone' was sparked by the memory of this unsettling place. When Arlo trades parts of herself in exchange for belonging and vengeance, it speaks to my affinity with monsters – often more so than humans. In truly affecting horror I think we are both.' — **Vikki Wakefield**

### Questions:

- How does the setting of this story affect mood and atmosphere? Refer to examples to demonstrate how the language and description makes you feel.
- What is the significance of the animals in the story? How and why does Arlo relate to them?
- Arlo shifts the balance of power from Cameron to herself – how does she do this? Is it magic, agency, or both?
- The scariest horror stories effectively tap into common human fears. What is Arlo afraid of, and how does she overcome her fears?
- 'Monsters are real, and ghosts are real too. They live inside us, and sometimes they win.' (Stephen King, *The Shining*) How is this quote relevant to the characters in 'Heart-shaped Stone'? What, or who, is the real monster in this story?

### Activities:

- The menace in this story is subtle; the ancient being in the canyon is never revealed. Write a descriptive passage imagining the creature has shown itself to you. What does it look like? Where does its magic come from?
- Continue the story by writing a scene where Arlo tests her power for a third time. Consider Arlo's evolving character – will she use her power for good, or for evil?
- Read urban legends online and research oral storytelling techniques. Write your own urban legend and tell it to an audience ... with the lights off!

### ***Related reading / resources:***

- *This is How We Change the Ending* by Vikki Wakefield
- *Ballad for a Mad Girl* by Vikki Wakefield
- *Inbetween Days* by Vikki Wakefield
- *Friday Brown* by Vikki Wakefield
- *All I Ever Wanted* by Vikki Wakefield

## 7. 'Stop Revive Survive' by Sarah Epstein

### About the author:

Sarah Epstein has been a horror fan since her teens when she regularly terrorised friends with scary stories and Ouija boards at sleepovers. She once stayed overnight in a disused quarantine station in the hopes of being haunted. You'll find her binge-watching shows about zombies or aliens at her home in bayside Melbourne.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'In 2018, I did a solo road trip up the Hume Highway to be with my dying dad in Sydney. It was a long and lonely drive, and my thoughts inevitably slid into dark places. I was worried about not making it in time. I was worried about fatigue. I was worried about pulling over, alone, to take breaks at isolated rest areas. Who or what might be lurking out there in wild bushland and dense pine forests, along those desolate back roads and scrubby plains? In my distressed emotional state, the beautiful Australian landscape took on a sinister edge and left me feeling vulnerable. This is what inspired my short story about two boys on a mercy dash, and a rest stop that goes awry.'

— Sarah Epstein

### Questions:

- What is the relationship like between the cousins, Eddie and Stu? How does the author show this through the characters' dialogue and actions?
- How would you describe Eddie at the beginning of the story? Does he change by the end? If so, describe how and why.
- Eddie thinks about something his Scottish grandfather says: '*The thing about monsters is they appear when ye least expect 'em. So ye have to be ready, ye ken?*' How does this relate to Eddie and what happens to him? Does this have more than one meaning or context in the story?
- The cousins encounter a strange creature. Where do you imagine it came from? What leads you to this idea?
- Comment on the structure of the story. It takes place in a single scene with limited characters. Why has the author chosen to tell the story in this way? Consider the use of setting, back-story, rising tension and perspective in your response.

### Activities:

- The story ends with Eddie in a stranger's car. What happens next? Write a scene about what you think happens to Eddie.
- Research what horror tropes are and how they can be used in storytelling. Which horror tropes are presented in this story? What is the difference between a trope and a cliché? Outline your ideas in an essay and provide examples.
- The author introduces the characters and setting, then gradually builds the tension into an action-driven and heart-pounding climax. Try writing your own suspenseful short story and consider how to use rising tension and character motivation to build the narrative to an exciting conclusion.

### Related reading / resources:

- *Deep Water* by Sarah Epstein
- *Small Spaces* by Sarah Epstein



## 8. 'Don't Look' by Lisa Fuller

### About the author:

Lisa Fuller is an award-winning Murri writer living in Canberra since 2006. She is trying to complete her PhD, lives in a renovators delight and is owned by a spoilt staffy. She spends her days trying to balance work and writing, battling her inner critic every step of the way.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

"Don't Look' is loosely based on a real event in my life. It was one of the most terrifying nights of my life, and I never stepped foot inside that house again. My cousin later admitted that she asked me to sleep over because she was scared to sleep there alone. She didn't warn me about its origins or anything else, because she knew I'd refuse to come. She was 100% right.

I think most of us have experienced that scary feeling of not being alone and wanting to look but fighting the urge. Yet, it's more terrifying when you can't see what's out there. I love and hate it when the monster stays in the shadows, never fully seen.

The story includes my community's beliefs that you should *never* look in those situations, and that our loved ones are never truly gone. Though we grieve their loss, we know they are always with us, especially when we need them most. All you have to do is trust your gut, and listen.' — **Lisa Fuller**

### Questions:

- What do you think the title is saying about the story? Consider Raina's own actions. How do you think they relate?
- Raina is very frustrated with her parents' overprotectiveness, but she only briefly brushes over why they're like this. She doesn't like thinking about Nick. Why do you think this is? How do her emotions impact her behaviour throughout the story? What effects can grief have on a person or family?
- Who (or what) comes and helps Raina and Candy? What do you think the author is trying to say here?
- At the end, Gramps hints that bad things happened in the old hospital, and that history is reaching out to hurt the children. What historical events do you think he is referring to?
- There are a lot of descriptions of the town and the land around it. Why do you think the author has chosen to do this? What are the differences between city and rural life that Raina notices?

### Activities:

- Research the author, Lisa Fuller. Present your findings as a biography card, wanted poster or Wikipedia entry. Consider writing an interview with the author, discussing the story 'Don't Look'. ([www.lisafuller.com.au](http://www.lisafuller.com.au)).
- The story briefly alludes to the Stolen Generations and the grief of many First Nations peoples, past and present. Readers might benefit from a refresher about the Stolen Generations (be aware there is distressing content here: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/stolen-generations> and <https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/media/video>). Complete a compare and contrast table, which compares the real-life political events with events in the story. Why has the author alluded to these events? What message is she trying to send?
- Grief is a strong theme within 'Don't Look', yet the narrative rarely talks directly about it. This can reflect how some people handle grief. Write about a time when you have experienced grief. What was it like? How did you respond to it?

### **Related reading / resources:**

- *Ghost Bird* by Lisa Fuller
- Information on the Stolen Generations (be aware there is distressing content here: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/stolen-generations> and <https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/media/video>)

## 9. 'Nature Boy' by Poppy Nwosu

### About the author:

Poppy Nwosu is the author of three YA rom-com novels called *Making Friends with Alice Dyson* (2019), *Taking Down Evelyn Tait* (2020), and *Road Tripping with Pearl Nash* (2021), and is the creator of *Hometown Haunts: #LoveOzYA Horror Tales*.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'I wrote 'Nature Boy' as a reaction to the overwhelming events of 2020, in the middle of which, I also had three people connected to me pass away. I often use fiction as a release for my emotions, and a way to process an experience without talking directly about it. Hence, the idea for the unravellings in my story.

While writing, I really didn't know what would happen when my protagonist witnessed an unravelling at the end. For a while I thought it would be a brutal thing of blood and guts, but then decided it would be like the stuffing coming out of a toy. It was only while listening to a favourite song by Nat King Cole (called 'Nature Boy') that I realised I wanted to end my story with hope.

I imagine the lyrics my main character sings at the end are from that song; *The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return*. To me, this represents those small moments of fierce beauty that still exist despite the sad times, and which make life worth living.' — **Poppy Nwosu**

### Questions:

- In this story, the world is experiencing a wave of mysterious 'unravellings'. Do you think the unravellings in the story might represent something from real life? If so, what do you think they represent? Discuss some stories (books, movies, television) that you believe use fantasy or horror to explore real world themes.
- Discuss different types of horror. The author considers her story 'Nature Boy' to be horror, because it is 'unsettling, disturbing and weird'. But some horror fans may think it is too gentle to be horror. What do you think makes a story into a horror story? Discuss.
- After reading this story, discuss the setting. The beach with the lava caves is a real place in Queensland (called Cape Hillsborough) and the cane fires, abattoir and lava formations were all inspired by the author's real childhood haunts. Think about a real place you have been. How could you describe it in a way that makes it seem surreal and strange? Mix real details and make-believe elements, and make up your own strange setting for a story.
- In the story, the protagonist talks with her cousin and uncle about what the mysterious unravellings look like. Everyone has different opinions and no one really knows the exact truth, taking their information from unverified sources on the internet or word of mouth. Discuss the different ways you receive information on a daily basis in real life. How do you sift through what is true and false, and how can we know the difference?
- What do you think the whale means to the protagonist of this story?

### Activities:

- Write a brief outline for your own short horror story. Choose a real life issue / theme / idea and then present it through a fantasy or horror lens. Share your outlines. Can your class guess what real life themes your story is exploring? Does it matter if they can't? Discuss.
- 'Nature Boy' was partially inspired by a song. Choose a favourite song of yours and use it to inspire your own story idea. What kind of story would you write?

- In 'Nature Boy' the unnamed protagonist is experiencing grief for her unravelled brother. Grief is a very hard thing to understand from the outside. It can feel very isolating when you experience grief, because no two people experience it in exactly the same way. The protagonist and her parents both loved her unravelled brother, but now he has been gone for a year and they are dealing with their emotions very differently. Write a short summary (one or two sentences) about how the protagonist and her parents want different things in order to help them grieve. Look for hints in the story.

### **Related reading / resources:**

- *Road Tripping with Pearl Nash* by Poppy Nwosu
- *Taking Down Evelyn Tait* by Poppy Nwosu
- *Making Friends with Alice Dyson* by Poppy Nwosu
- 'Nature Boy' sung by Nat King Cole: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq0XJCJ1Srw>

## 10. ‘Slaughterhouse Boys’ by Emma Osborne

### About the author:

Emma Osborne is a queer fiction writer and poet from Melbourne, Australia. Their writing has appeared in *Uncanny Magazine*, *Nightmare Magazine*, *Apex Magazine*, *Queers Destroy Science Fiction*, *Pseudopod*, *Wastelands 3: The New Apocalypse*, *the Year’s Best Australian Fantasy and Horror* and *GlitterShip*. Emma lives in Melbourne with their two cats, Maze and Pancake. You can find them on Twitter as @redscribe.

### Author’s inspiration behind the story:

“Slaughterhouse Boys’ deeply represents the Australian country where I grew up – the party, with all of the drunkenness and chaos and horror is something I attended on scores of occasions as a young kid. I wanted to explore the feeling of not-belonging that I felt as a queer kid, the feeling of wanting to be somewhere I could be myself, and the fear that being myself would bring rejection.

‘Slaughterhouse Boys’ also grapples with my uncomfortableness being an omnivore who nevertheless is deeply disturbed by factory farming and animal abuse. Meat and blood and toxic masculinity and queerness and acceptance all folded neatly into this story as I was writing it. In the story, meat is a precious rarity, and I wanted to look at the repercussions of that in terms of family, of permitted violence, and the weight of expectation.

I also really wanted to explore the choice of my character, Tom, to seek the approval of his blood family rather than removing himself from his life as he knows it, from what is uncomfortable but relatively safety, at least for now. I’d like to think he makes it out eventually.’ — **Emma Osborne**

### Questions:

- What role does meat have in the story? Why is it important?
- The story is set after the cow has been killed. How does this impact the tension of the story?
- What does Tom want? Does he get what he wants?
- Family is central to the story. How does Tom feel about his parents? How do they feel about him?
- Think about the title of the story, ‘Slaughterhouse Boys’. How does it relate to the text?

### Activites:

- Re-title the story. Explain why your title is a good fit.
- What would have happened if Tom refused to kill the cow, or eat the meat? Write another ending or a scene where he refuses.
- What is symbolism? Write a short response on the symbolism of the cow, or of the heirloom knife Tom owns.

## 11. 'Euryhaline' by Margot McGovern

### About the author:

Margot McGovern is an Adelaide-based author and horror film junkie. She holds a creative writing PhD from Flinders University and her debut novel *Neverland* (Penguin Random House Aus.) was shortlisted for the 2020 Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature and the 2015 Text Prize. You can find her on Instagram: @project\_lectito

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'In 'Euryhaline' a swimming champion becomes convinced there's something sinister out to get her in the pool at her elite new school. It's a story about adapting to a hostile, high performance environment and the intense pressure we place on ourselves to succeed, particularly when we feel we don't fit in.

To me, Imposter Syndrome – with which I'm all too familiar – has always felt particularly maleficent for the way it seeks out the things that bring us the most joy and twists them into a source of anxiety and fear. I wanted to explore that in 'Euryhaline' by drawing on my terror of submerged machinery (submechanophobia) and things brushing against my legs in the water to manifest Tam's anxiety and self-doubt as something monstrous.'

— **Margot McGovern**

### Questions:

- Given what the story reveals about Tam's past, do you think she should have accepted the scholarship to Milford? Why or why not?
- Can you think of a time when you felt under pressure? What helped you cope?
- Tam can be read as an 'unreliable narrator.' What hints are there that Tam's perspective is skewed? Can you think of other texts that employ this device, and why might horror writers in particular make use of this type of narrator?
- Do you believe the naiad in the pool is real or a figment of Tam's imagination? Which is more unsettling? And what might the monster represent? Support your discussion with examples from the text.
- The story's ending is somewhat ambiguous. Do you think Tam is going to be okay? And why might the author have chosen to leave the outcome uncertain?

### Activities:

- Make a list of steps Tam, her friends, her family and the school might have taken to better support her at Milford.
- Pretend you're Izzy and describe Tam in a letter to a friend – how does Tam appear to her and how might that differ from how Tam views herself?
- Invent a monster based on something that frightens you. What form does the monster take? What abilities does it have? How might you defeat it?

### Related reading / resources:

- *Neverland* by Margot McGovern

## 12. 'Hunger' by Marianna Shek

### About the author:

Marianna Shek writes YA speculative fiction. She has a PhD in transmedia storytelling. In 2020, she was the winner of the CYA fiction prize and shortlisted for the Affirm Press Mentorship Award at Varuna House. Her stories have been published by *Space and Time Magazine*, Serenity Press and Griffith University.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'As a child, I had an insatiable appetite. Growing up in Hong Kong, I was exposed to a weird and wonderful array of culinary delicacies. Fermented tofu, frog legs and chicken giblets were my favourite things to eat! Nowadays, we have a thriving foodie culture. People share their experiences of how certain flavours and scents bring back the memories of home. This is not my relationship with food. When I think about certain dishes, I'm hit by the sense of umami, and then I remember my greed, my craving to eat more and never being sated.'

The premise for 'Hunger' is based on my childhood experience. In my family home, we had a shrine with statues of Buddha and a framed photo of my grandparents and great grandparents. At the centre of the altar was a Swarovski crystal bowl. It was implicitly understood that the fresh fruit from the

weekly groceries goes into the fruit bowl as an offering before consumption. One day, I couldn't wait and I stole a mango from my ancestors.

The story of 'Hunger' is my imaginings of the retribution based on the ghost stories I grew up with.'

— **Marianna Shek**

### Questions:

- The concept of ghosts exists in every culture. What is a ghost story you remember from your childhood? How did this ghost story make you feel at the time?
- In 'Hunger', Christina is a first generation migrant from Hong Kong. The writer fashioned her character from her own experiences growing up in Hong Kong and Australia. It is important to portray characters from different cultures but not create characters that are stereotypes. What is a stereotype? Can you think of some characters you have seen on television or in film (or read in a book or played in a game), which are racially stereotyped? Explain why you think these characters are not authentic.
- The title of this short story is also its main theme: Hunger. Another theme in the story is that of greed. Both gluttony and greed are part of the seven deadly sins in Christianity. Can you list all seven of the deadly sins? Can you think of other stories in the horror genre that uses the seven deadly sins as inspiration?

### Activities:

- Re-write a childhood ghost story and give it your own interpretation. Think about changing the ghost story to a different location or a different time period. How do you feel about the story now? Watch this short animated film *Hair Love* (2019) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNw8V\\_Fkw28](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNw8V_Fkw28) Write a synopsis (about four sentences) about what happens in this film. How do you feel about the film? Do you think the characters are portrayed authentically or as stereotypes?
- Ghosts and supernatural beings can evoke fear in their readers when they are physically monstrous. They may have sharp teeth, extra limbs or are gigantic in size. But monsters that resemble humans can also be scary. For this activity, you will be collaboratively creating a monster creature based on the seven deadly sins.W

- Fold a piece of paper into thirds.
- Draw the 'head' of a monster character based on one of the seven deadly sins.
- Extend the line work a little into the second part of the paper so the second person knows where to continue. When you are ready, fold over your drawing so the second person can't see what you've drawn. Make sure on the second segment of paper, you also write what deadly sin the monster is based on.
- Pass your 'head' drawing to the person on your right. The second person continues your drawing by completing the torso in the second section of the piece of paper. Again, be sure to extend the line work a little into the third part of the paper. When you are done, fold over the drawing so the next person can't see what you've drawn.
- The third person finishes the drawing by completing the legs of the character.
- When you have finished drawing the legs, pass the paper along to the person on your right one more time.
- Everyone should unfold their piece of paper. What sort of monster have you and your classmates come up with? Can you write a story based on this monster?

### ***Related reading / resources:***

- [https://writingtheother.com/appropriate-cultural-appropriation/?fbclid=IwAR2BtIOOdG3hJRrczOt9QH\\_QI8bqA5JOEAUckTchqsZh\\_LWXL3-l5ax7t8](https://writingtheother.com/appropriate-cultural-appropriation/?fbclid=IwAR2BtIOOdG3hJRrczOt9QH_QI8bqA5JOEAUckTchqsZh_LWXL3-l5ax7t8)
- <https://mythcreants.com/blog/how-to-personify-the-seven-deadly-sins/>



### 13. 'Do I See it All Now?' by Michelle O'Connell

#### **About the author:**

Michelle O'Connell is an artist from Adelaide, South Australia and a recent graduate of a Bachelor of Design (Illustration and Animation). She finds great comfort and happiness when she shares her creations and ideas with others. This is especially true if people can relate to her creations and know that they're not alone in the things they feel and experience. Expressing herself through art is her lifeline and passion.

#### **Author's inspiration behind the story:**

'My story is inspired by growing up being neurodivergent and undiagnosed. A girl experiences life through her own lens. Her understanding of the world and how she is treated is filtered through it, perceiving negative and dangerous situations as neutral and harmless until later.

While growing up, she sees glimpses of reality. Every life event cracks the lens she sees the world through, until she eventually sees it for how it really is.' — **Michelle O'Connell**

#### **Questions:**

- The author says her story was inspired by growing up being neurodivergent and undiagnosed. Discuss how you think these experiences come into play and are represented within the story.
- Many older forms of storytelling have morals at their centre. If this story had a moral, what do you think it would be?
- Do you think the colour of the illustrations impacts the tone of the story? Give examples of how the colours impact the tone.
- In Australia, there are many unspoken rules for interacting socially with other people, rules that are not ever specifically taught to us but that we are still expected to know and abide by, in order to interact politely in society. What do you think some of these rules are? What do you think life is like for those of us who might not understand these untaught rules? Would not knowing these rules make things easier or harder for that person? How might people react to someone who doesn't follow these unspoken rules?
- What kind of character journey does the protagonist of this story experience?

#### **Activities:**

- Summarise the entire story in your own words.

## 14. 'Angel Eyes' by Alison Evans

### About the author:

Alison Evans is the award-winning author of the YA novels *Euphoria Kids*, *Highway Bodies* and *Ida*, and is a contributor in the anthology *Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzYA Stories*. They live on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri People.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'When Poppy asked me to write something for this anthology, I started by thinking about the things that scare me the most. This has been a good strategy for my writing, and my first two books focused on two of my biggest fears. Body horror is a particularly frightening branch of horror to me.

The next step was figuring out what kind of question I wanted to explore.

The way puberty is talked about by adults is often in quite monstrous terms, but it's not a monstrous thing at all. It's a stage of life. What parallels could I draw in a story that had characters going through both voluntary and involuntary physical changes? With that in mind: what makes a monster?' — **Alison Evans**

### Questions:

- How has the author used setting and landscape in their story to create atmosphere? The neighborhood the story is set in is a real place in Melbourne, yet the story feels very otherworldly. How has the author achieved this? Discuss.
- In this story, posters appear that say 'cleanse the sins'. Look up the definition of the word 'sin'. Do you think everyone has the same interpretation of this word, or do you think different people may think different things are a sin? Who gets to decide what is a sin and what is not? Is that fair for everyone?
- Discuss how the descriptions of the 'angels' in this story make you feel. Talk about the different elements the author used to create these creatures (hint: physical descriptions, taste, sound, the way their sighting makes the protagonist feel). Do you think the author's approach of mixing these elements makes for a more visceral description than a straight list of physical attributes? Discuss.
- In the story, the main characters are able to shape-shift into wolves, and this makes them targets. They are not hurting anyone, so why do you think the angels don't like them and want the wolves to be different from what they are? What do the angels intend for the wolves?
- At the end of the story, the angel is revealed to be another teen around the same age as the wolves. How would you interpret this ending?

### Activities:

- This story has a strong body horror element. Describe yourself in a short paragraph, but add in some body horror elements. Try to use the same techniques as the author does in the story. For instance, think about touch, taste, sound, smell etc.
- In the story, we see that the angels easily judge others for their perceived 'sins'. It is very easy to judge other people, especially on the Internet, where people become faceless and feel far away. Have you ever judged someone quickly without meaning to? Has someone else ever judged you? Write down your thoughts in a short paragraph to explain why you think these two instances are similar or different.

- This story is set in a neighborhood that is very familiar to the author. Write a short descriptive paragraph of your home neighborhood, school, or a place very familiar to you, in a way that would suit a horror or ghost story. Try your best to give your description a 'horror' feel, while still accurately describing the real place.

**Related reading / resources:**

- *Euphoria Kids* by Alison Evans
- *Highway Bodies* by Alison Evans
- *Ida* by Alison Evans
- *Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzYA Stories*

## 15. 'Best Years of Your Life' by Felix Wilkins

### About the author:

Felix Wilkins is a screenwriter and filmmaker based in Melbourne. When he's not sweating over how to portray himself in his own bio, he's likely to be watching horror movies or producing content for his production company, Yabba Films.

### Author's inspiration behind the story:

'Whoever first used the phrase 'the best years of your life' in reference to adolescence is an unrelenting sadist, and possibly more qualified to be a horror writer than I or anyone else published in this anthology.

The constant state of hormone-fuelled physical and mental dysphoria, the feelings that seem to hit either in complete extremes or not at all, having to maintain relationships with family and friends in the midst of all this, and feeling absolutely powerless to change any of it. This is a time of transformation, a slow, lingering, painful transformation that is made a million

times worse by the looming presence of the future constantly hanging above, obscuring the better version of yourself that you aspire to be and replacing it with a temperamental, depressive, unstable monster that you barely recognise.

So if this time is genuinely the 'best years of your life', then don't tell Tori, unless you want to ruffle a few feathers.' — **Felix Wilkins**

### Questions:

- Describe Tori's relationships, both with her parents and her best friend.
- How does Tori's narration portray her physical and vocal outbursts? How is she feeling in these moments?
- Is Tori being entirely honest with herself within her narration? Why/why not?
- To what effect is the story's first-person perspective utilised?
- What might Tori's gradual transformation symbolise?

### Activities:

- Consider the opening paragraph, in which Tori reveals what appears to be genuine hatred towards Australian society and culture. Is there a potential version of Australia that Tori would prefer? If so, what does this vision of Australia look like?
- Research emus. What behavioural parallels, both mental and physical, exist between Tori and the emu?
- Think upon your own experiences – at home and school, with friends and family. With this in mind, is Tori worthy of empathy, sympathy, or is she not deserving of either?

## 16. ‘Rappaccini’s Son’ by Holden Sheppard

### About the author:

Holden Sheppard’s novel *Invisible Boys* (Fremantle Press, 2019) won accolades including the WA Premier’s Prize for an Emerging Writer. His work has appeared in *Griffith Review*, *Westerly*, *10 Daily* and *HuffPost*. In his downtime, Holden is a gym junkie and plays footy (AFL). He lives in Perth with his husband.

### Author’s inspiration behind the story:

‘When I started brainstorming this story, I knew I wanted to tap into my own inner fears. What most horrified me growing up was the prospect of doing the wrong thing. Despite trying to be a good Catholic boy, my biggest fear as a teenager was that my core was rotten; that I was a bad boy: deviant, rude, weird, unlikable, not good enough.

During that brainstorming in late 2020, I was working out at the gym, earphones in, when I stumbled across a Fleetwood Mac song, ‘Running Through the Garden’. I was captivated: the lyrics suggested a much bigger story. I listened to it on repeat and when I got home, I discovered Stevie Nicks apparently wrote it after being inspired by American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1844 short story ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’.

After I read ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’, I was inspired, too. I wanted to tell a warped love story between two young men, adapting the poison garden of Hawthorne’s tale, and Nicks’ lyric, into a metaphor for my own fears: that tug-of-war between flowery virtue and the angry weed-like desire to behave badly.

And so, ‘Rappaccini’s Son’ was born, a way to make Giovanni face his demons around his self-actualisation.’ —  
**Holden Sheppard**

### Questions:

- ‘Rappaccini’s Son’ is written in first person. Why do you think the author chose to employ this point of view?
- Giovanni struggles to articulate his feelings for Santino. Why do you think this is? How does his Italian heritage and his hometown being a small, rural setting play a part in how comfortable he feels to be himself?
- What do you think Giovanni is most afraid of, and how does this show up in the story?
- Much of the story is set in the Rappaccini garden. What do you think the poison garden represents? Why is it important?
- Giovanni and Santino seem like opposites – or are they similar? Which character is good and which is bad, or is it more complex than that? Which character do you identify with the most?

### Activities:

- The author was inspired by another short story, called ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’ by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Read the original (or look up a plot summary online): [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f1124y-001/resources/Rappaccinis\\_Daughter.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f1124y-001/resources/Rappaccinis_Daughter.pdf) . Choose a story that you like (for instance, a fairytale or a different short story). Rewrite that story and twist it into something new. Make as many changes to the original as you can, while still ensuring that your new story has connections to the old one.
- List some other examples (movies, novels and television shows) that are retellings of older stories. Choose a favourite one and write a list of the different ways the story has been updated to appeal more to modern audiences.

- Research Holden Sheppard. Write your findings as a wanted poster, biography card or wanted poster.

***Related reading / resources:***

- *Invisible Boys* by Holden Sheppard
- 'Rappaccini's Daughter' by Nathaniel Hawthorne: [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f1124y-001/resources/Rappaccinis\\_Daughter.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f1124y-001/resources/Rappaccinis_Daughter.pdf)



