



GOOD YOUNG MEN

Written by GARY LONESBOROUGH

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 15–18 YEARS OLD (UPPER SECONDARY, YEARS 10 TO 12)

GENRE: Young Adult Fiction

THEMES: Justice; friendship; community; identity; courage; love; truth-telling; racism; Australia's justice system, injustice and police brutality/deaths in custody; LGBTQIA+; healthy choices and the impact of drugs and alcohol; #LoveOzYA

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English: Literature, literacy and language
- HASS: History and Civics and Citizenship
- Health & Physical Education: Personal, Social and Community Health
- Cross-curriculum Priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- General Capabilities: Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding

NOTES WRITTEN BY: Cara Shipp

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SENSITIVITY WARNING

While overall a novel of positivity where characters find their strength and happiness in truth-telling, friendship and community, this novel does openly deal with challenging topics connected to homophobia, racism and police brutality (specifically Aboriginal deaths in custody). These are important issues impacting many Australians every day and well worth tackling through this warm and sensitively written novel. The initial introductory activities suggested allow for a discussion of the community services available for students and families needing support, and it is prudent to foreground this with the following list of support services:

LIFELINE AUSTRALIA: 13 11 14; www.lifeline.org.au/ (includes online chat facility)
BEYOND BLUE: 1300 22 4636; www.beyondblue.org.au/ (includes online chat facility)
KIDS HELPLINE: 1800 55 1800; <https://kidshelpline.com.au/> (includes online chat facility)
BE YOU: Resources for educators <https://beyou.edu.au/>
REACH OUT: Resources for young people, parents and schools <https://au.reachout.com/>

There are also some references to violence (fight scenes between boys, threats of violence, policeman shooting a boy during arrest resulting in the boy's death in front of one of his friends) and there are some scenes depicting underage drinking and marijuana use. Most of the main characters pursue healthy and positive lifestyles and increasingly avoid involvement in drinking, drugs and fighting. They have goals for themselves after Year 12 and are successful in working towards these goals.

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

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

CULTURAL SAFETY

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

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

It is important that teachers monitor class conversation and students' comprehension of the novel to ensure that readers are not making generalisations about First Nations people based on the novel's content – like in any society, there are some people impacted by poverty, alcohol and drug use, who interact with the justice system and make bad choices,

but this is not necessarily representative of all the people in that culture and is not inherent in their genetic make-up. Teachers should listen for and challenge any stereotyping that First Nations people are 'genetically predisposed' to certain behaviour or that 'all' First Nations people act in a certain way.

Teachers may like to set up a few check-in systems (verbal and non-verbal, anonymous, private and public) – surveys, exit tickets, hand gestures (thumbs up or down), comment box, journals. Throughout the novel study, invite students to let you know how they are feeling and if anything is coming up for them. Liaise with school First Nations support staff when planning the unit of work and throughout, seek and accept their advice and work with them to check in with First Nations students who may be triggered or upset by either the book's themes or students' responses in class.

INTRODUCTION

Good Young Men is an honest and accessible novel told from the point of view of three characters, Kallum, Jordy and Dylan, who were close friends in primary school (the boys from Chopin Drive), but have drifted apart in high school and now reconnect after the death of the fourth member of their childhood group, Brandon.

Brandon is murdered by a policeman at a house party when being apprehended for stealing. He is shot and dies in a pool of blood in front of Dylan. The Aboriginal community, of which the four boys are part, are reeling from this latest Aboriginal death at the hands of the justice system and see it as racially motivated. The town is divided and racial tensions erupt. A group of young white men who continually express homophobic and racist views, and have always taunted the Chopin Drive friendship group, actively stir up trouble and violently threaten Dylan against testifying in court in the trial of the police officer.

Against this background, the boys of Chopin Drive take on caring roles within their families, explore career options, gain their driver's licence, graduate Year 12 and win scholarships and entry into Sydney tertiary institutions. Dylan, the most seriously impacted friend, processes his grief by creating a film to tell the truth and expose the injustice in the situation. Jordy and Kallum grow into themselves as gay men, and Kallum is honest with himself and his family about not wanting to pursue a professional football career.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How can we define people in binary terms such as good/bad? People can be good and kind and responsible citizens but make mistakes, people can do awful things but never come before the law or be judged for their acts.
- Recognising discrimination and its impact: the ongoing homophobic and racist taunts from Terry and 'the rednecks', the racist graffiti at the shopping centre.
- How important is it to challenge assumptions about people? Dylan is seen as part of a gang who drink and smoke and roam the streets at night but is a thoughtful and

artistic filmmaker who wins a scholarship to a film academy in Sydney and helps his dad clean and cook for his nan. Kallum is seen as a footy jock but is more interested in caring for Country as a parks and wildlife ranger and becomes increasingly comfortable as a young gay man. Jordy cares for his younger sister, dad and brother after the death of his mum and is an aspiring actor who gains a place in an acting college in Sydney. They are all 'good young men' who deal with family responsibilities and face prejudices and still navigate through with a focus on achieving their future goals.

- What difference does having a sense of friendship, family, community and belonging have? Dylan, Kallum and Jordy have strong family and community ties and their rekindled friendship carries them through in the end.
- How can we see the concepts of intergenerational trauma and systemic racism, the continuing impacts of colonisation, playing out in the experiences of the boys from Chopin Drive?
- What do we know about the over-representation of First Nations youth in juvenile justice systems? Or the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in deaths in custody generally? How easy is it for police to abuse their power, make up excuses and justify their actions to get away with violence? In what ways does the broader Australian society protect and uphold the justice system despite its injustices and racism?

PLOT SUMMARY

A searing and unputdownable YA novel from acclaimed award-winning author Gary Lonesborough.

'As we step into the shopping centre car park, white spray-paint on the orange brick wall catches my eye. Two council workers in high-vis shirts are on ladders, scrubbing away the faded words: WHITE POWER.'

In the idyllic coastal town of Carraway's Point, four Aboriginal boys grew up together on Chopin Drive, carefree and close. But they drifted apart in high school, and everything changed forever the night Brandon was killed by a white cop.

Now racial tension is brewing, and each boy must wrestle with grief and their own complicated lives.

Kallum has lost his sport scholarship and must return from Sydney.

Jordy contends with family responsibilities and a closeted boyfriend.

Dylan was the only witness to Brandon's death, and he must testify in court.

Struggling to contain their emotions and process the murder of their friend, Kallum, Jordy and Dylan must navigate explosive events in a way that opens up a future they can't yet see.

A brilliant contemporary YA coming-of-age novel about three small-town Aboriginal friends finding their way towards adulthood, from the multi-award-winning author of *The Boy from the Mish*, *We Didn't Think It Through* and *I'm Not Really Here*.

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, death and grief, alcoholism and family breakdown, navigating sexuality, homophobia, 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.

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

First Nations Perspectives

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

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

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

- Oxford University Press Yarning Strong Professional Support
This material supports teachers to understand the social and historical contexts for the series of books about Identity, Family, Law and Land. It answers questions and misconceptions to support teachers to deal with these sensitively in the classroom, questions such as 'What is Welcome to Country?' and 'How can you be Aboriginal if you don't have dark skin?' The resource dispels negative stereotypes and racial assumptions through videos presented by prominent First Nations people including Larissa Behrendt, Willie Brim, Des Crump and Kym Smith.
- Redfern, Sydney
Good Young Men begins with Kallum leaving his Aunty's house in Redfern to return home to his parents in a little seaside town (Carraway's Point), after being expelled from a Sydney school which he attended on a prestigious football scholarship. While most settings in this novel are fictional, Redfern is an inner-city Sydney suburb of great significance to Aboriginal people. It is worth contextualising the novel with an acknowledgement of the land on which Redfern sits in relation to your school and student's location, using the AIATSIS languages map. Information about Redfern's importance as a site of activism, community and strength is included in the links

below, as well as information about the connection between Redfern, Aboriginal sportspeople and activists, and the Rabbitohs football club (Kallum's dream club and the club where his hero, Greg Inglis, played).

- NIAA – Empowered Communities – Redfern
<https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/indigenous/empowered-communities/alt/description-redfern.html>
- History of Aboriginal Sydney – Redfern Oral History
<http://redfernoralhistory.org/Timeline/Timeline/tabid/239/Default.aspx>
- South Sydney Rabbitohs – 'The people's team' – connection to Indigenous communities
<https://www.rabbitohs.com.au/content/the-peoples-team#:~:text=A%20special%20relationship%20was%20born,traced%20back%20to%20that%20club>
- Aboriginal deaths in custody and history with police and legal systems
This is a broad and complex topic but is relevant to introduce to students to support their understanding of the circumstances around, and reactions to, Brandon's death during apprehension by police.
 - ABC article reflecting on the current statistics since the royal commission into deaths in custody – www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-29/600-aboriginal-deaths-in-custody-since-the-royal-commission/105567164
 - Common ground article – www.commonground.org.au/article/deaths-in-custody
 - ABC Topic collection – www.abc.net.au/news/topic/black-deaths-in-custody

Discussion Points

- What are the incarceration and death in custody rates of First Nations people compared to other Australians?
- What are the possible factors contributing to these rates?
- In what ways might police racism or lack of cultural competency play a part in these rates?
- What are some of the recommendations around preventing deaths in custody?

Q&A WITH GARY LONESBOROUGH

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

'This book began as three different manuscripts of three different stories. I was inspired to write Jordy's story because I really wanted to write a story about a boy who'd had his heart broken and learned to heal himself. I was inspired to write Kallum's story because the scene of him returning to his hometown on a bus, after losing his scholarship at a prestigious sporting college, was lingering in my mind for months. I wanted to explore the story of a boy who had to return to his hometown and face the expectations of his peers and parents,

who at the same time was beginning to explore new passions while on the journey to accepting his sexuality. I was inspired to write Dylan's story in response to a number of news items – stories of Aboriginal people dying in custody and no accountability being placed on anyone for their deaths. This included a highly public case of a white police officer who shot and killed an Aboriginal teen and faced no real consequences for his actions (I choose not to publicly identify the case). I'd shelved all of these ideas until a news story came of an Aboriginal boy who was killed by a group of men, who was sent home from hospital at first and then later died of his injuries. I was extremely passionate about the truth and justice, and I began to form this new story in my head which blended these three manuscripts I had stopped working on. The passion I felt to tell this story was directly in response to injustice and the continued killing of Aboriginal teens, and I used that passion to bring these stories together and create *Good Young Men*.'

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: ENGLISH

LITERATURE

Year 11-12

Unit 2 and 4

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

Year 10

- Language
- Literature
- Literacy

QUESTIONS – LANGUAGE FEATURES AND LITERARY DEVICES

- Discuss the author's choice to begin the book with a short quote that appears later in Dylan's section of the novel, depicting the scene where 'WHITE POWER' has been spray-painted across the wall of the shopping centre carpark. What is being framed and foregrounded here? Why is this important?
- The author uses **descriptive language, imagery and figurative language** throughout the novel to put readers into the shoes of the characters and help them see the characters' viewpoints. Discuss the following examples:
 - *'The weight of my duffel bag is killing me; all the books, clothes and shoes I could fit – my whole life as I knew it – burning into my shoulder.'* (p. 5)
 - *'A heaviness filled my stomach like cement. It was sour, poisonous. My toes curled tight in my shoes and I held my sweaty hands in my lap.'* (p. 11)

- *'There's a breeze rolling through the trees and the branches sway against each other, like an earthly windchime. The sound makes my heartrate slow, steadies my breathing and relaxes my shoulders. The smell of rain lingers in the air and the grey clouds in the sky are threatening a downpour.'* (p. 73-74)
- *'I surrender myself to my pillow, and the tears come like a tsunami of this-is-the-shittest-I've-felt-since-mum-died. I take deep breaths, in and out, imagining I've fallen from the cliff, sinking deeper beneath the dark waves, and I look up to see the white water breaking above me.'* (p. 125)
- *'Dylan flings open the screen door and it screeches like a dying bat.'* (p. 145)
- *'The bed creaks like an unoiled tinman.'* (p. 173)
- *'It's the dead of night, but the bush is alive. Chirps and clicks and rustling leaves surround us. It's full-on surround sound, like sitting in the middle of a cinema.'* (p. 174)
- *'He flicks down his sunglasses and the greys in his five o'clock shadow look white under the sunlight beaming through the windscreen. We head towards town. Dad's lawnmower is in the back, and the inside of the car smells like mowed grass and sweat and cigarette smoke. His seat covers are tattered and there are empty Coke cans everywhere...On the floor of the passenger seat, there are random pieces of paper ripped from a notebook, each with scribbles and sentences written in blue and black pen. Dad's a writer...'* (p. 196-197)
- *'Terry's driving. His sunburnt face turns to our car as he sees me in the window. A wild smile grows across his face – the kind of smile that says I could kill you and eat your heart.'* (p. 197)
- *'I feel the bottoms of my shoes catch fire. There's a force in my chest telling me to run...it's the anxiety – the trial starts next week.'* (p. 204)
- **Text to self-connection** Kallum arranges to spend an afternoon with Jordy's father who is a park ranger, as he is considering careers that he might be interested in as a back-up to football, and he knows that he enjoys being out in the bush. But he doesn't want to tell everyone about his ranger idea just yet. Using the key quotes below, discuss with students if they can relate to this thinking. Do they sometimes hold back and not tell people their plans in case they will be ridiculed, or talked out of it, or the plans fail? Do they feel key people in their lives support them with their ideas, or knock them down? Invite any student responses verbally before asking all students to respond to this individually as a journal entry. Key quotes:
 - *'I won't tell Dad or Mum about it. They would think I'm wasting my time – time that could be better spent working out or something.'* (p. 71)
 - *'I didn't tell Eric I was going out to the national park, either. For some reason, I didn't want anyone else to know about it. What if I go out there and realise that I hate everything involved in being a park ranger? What if Eric thinks it's a stupid back-up plan to have, or stupid to have a back-up plan at all?'* (p. 71)
- **Characterisation** Discuss some of the key characters and how the author develops them. Key sections of the book are noted below for reference.
 - Kallum

- *'I create the sounds of the bush – leaves and branches brushing against each other in the breeze, birds singing. I imagine the smell of the trees, hear the quiet, and it calms me.'* (p. 13)
- *'If I could tell anyone the full story, it would be Keira. She used to be my best friend. We aren't as close since I moved off to boarding school, though.'* (p. 20)
- *'He used to always ramble on about getting signed to the Cronulla Sharks feeder club when he was sixteen, but how he liked grog too much and so it never happened for him. I guess I'm his second chance.'* (p. 25)
- Chapter 4 – discusses why he got in a fight, suspecting he is gay, wrestling with his feelings
- *'As we begin the drive back, I think I'm in trouble, because holding this little injured ringtail possum in my hands, knowing that this is an actual job someone can get – to look after the bush and the animals in it – makes me feel like footy doesn't matter at all.'* (p. 76)
- *'Bodies became important, how we looked became important. Muscles. Abs. Calves. Chests. I got caught up in it with them, and in the process, left Jordy behind. Feels like wasted time now.'* (p. 77)
- Jordy
 - *'Just like hanging out with Amber and being with Eric, watching movies helps me take a break from this life where my mum died and my dad and brother are spiralling and I worry and worry and worry about shit all the time. I guess that's why I love acting so much – it's a kind of holiday. I love Al Pacino in this. I want to be just like him when I become an actor. I want to have the presence he has when he's on screen. I love the way he stares and I've been practising my own stare in the mirror.'* (p. 117)
 - *'Inside, I take two steps across the tiles and gently surrender myself to the floor. I lie flat, let the tears flow... I open Spotify and navigate to my four-hour Kylie Minogue playlist. I scroll the songs until I find the one I need to hear right now: 'A lifetime to repair'. I play the song beside my head on the floor. I hum along at first, but when it gets to the chorus, I blast the lyrics like I'm breathing fire. The fire helps me roll to the side, plant my knees. My hands are cold and numb against the tiles. I get to my feet and wipe my cheeks dry with my wrists. As Kylie continues to sing, and me along with her, the decision comes to me. I will never cry over Eric again.'* (p. 135)
 - Jordy shows his support for Dylan at the trial. Jordy and Kallum accompany Dylan and wait outside the courtroom. Jordy reassures Dylan that whatever he chooses to do is okay – tell the truth for justice, or lie to avoid being killed by Terry (p. 246).
- Dylan
 - Jordy sees that Dylan's movie is surprisingly good, and he is really serious about wanting to be a filmmaker (p. 148).

- Dylan talks about what he hopes to achieve with the film – he knows it will be *'political, topical'* (p. 196).
 - We see Dylan's love and care for his nan when he visits her at the housing estate. We also see how his parents have worked to create a better life away from the estate (p. 201).
 - Dylan's ongoing trauma:
 - *'When I think of Brandon, I usually see his face as it was the last time I saw him – as I wish I'd never seen it. There was a spatter of red on his chin, mouth opened but no sound, his eyes blinking slowly as his brown cheeks turned pale. I don't like to think about that face.'* (p. 190)
 - *'It's dreamy, scattered, just like the nightmares that come every now and then. I haven't had one for a while, but they're always dark and disjointed, and Brandon's always there. I'd see him being chased through a deserted Carraway's Point by this thing that looked like a shadow with a crown on the top of its head. I hate those nightmares. They make me feel awful, and the awfulness lasts the whole day, like I've been struck by lightning.'* (p. 194)
 - After the night Brandon died, Dylan doesn't want to drink anymore and he avoids Rory's place where the death occurred. When his friends go there, he partly feels he should go with them *'to make sure they get home okay.'* (p. 208)
 - We see Dylan's resilience and bravery when he submits his film for scholarship consideration after the harrowing night with Terry abducting him and threatening to kill him in chapters 25-26, and when he testifies at court, telling the truth about the policeman's wrongdoing despite Terry's threats (p. 249-251).
- Brandon
- The memory of the dog threatening to attack them as boys, and Brandon being the brave one who calmed the dog down (p. 68).
 - *'If it was me who got killed, and Brandon was up here, he would tell the truth – every word of it – no matter the consequences. Brandon was brave – braver than me. Brandon was funny. Brandon was compassionate. Brandon wanted to be an Aboriginal health worker. Brandon had plans of one day moving to Townsville to attend every North Queensland Cowboys home game.'* (p. 249)
 - Memory of Brandon getting his P's and taking Dylan to the beach (p. 275-276). It shows his mum's love for him (he blamed his chubby cheeks on his mum squeezing them), his larrikin, knock-about nature, and his support and encouragement of Dylan's filmmaking: *'Brandon was always egging us on to do the things we wanted, to chase dreams. I swear he could see things in us that we hadn't yet, like how I wanted to be a filmmaker. He was the first person who ever suggested I could actually do it.'* (p. 278-279)

- The memory of Brandon being bravest when they snuck out to the river, swimming out the furthest (p. 292).
- *'Something I think about all the time: was Brandon scared when he was dying? I think he might've been terrified as he lay there, but once he realised it was over, he might've been okay. He was brave, always. He would've accepted it, then thought about something nice. Maybe about his mum, maybe Simba, maybe that time he swam out to the middle of the black water and hollered his way to the other side.'* (p. 292)
- *'The rednecks' – 'It was those rednecks from the hills. They race each other along bush roads and hunt boars. They have hunting guns and muscles and blue jeans and cowboy boots. They get together on weekends and do stupid shit, like chase Koori kids in their cars and throw bricks at houses. When I was in Year Seven, they threw a half-drunk can of beer from their car window at me. It exploded on the footpath and sprayed beer all over my legs and school shoes. They shouted white power as they sped away.'* (p. 189).

Are these stereotypes? Does everyone who hunts and lives in the bush do bad things like drink and terrorise people? Is the author promoting a stereotype, or is he simply representing these particular characters in this way?

- Ask students to compare the three main characters' relationships with their fathers and identify key quotes to support their discussion. Have students work in groups and then report back to class, adding any notes or observations their peers have made that they may have missed. Some page prompts for key quotes are provided below.
 - Kallum – p. 25, p. 29-30, p. 52, p. 53-54, p. 55, Chapter 10
 - Jordy – Chapter 11, p. 73, p. 117, p. 136, p. 148-152, p. 155
 - Dylan – p. 191-192, p. 198, p. 199, p. 207
- The main characters are carers – Dylan with his nan, Jordy with his dad and siblings. They cook, clean, run errands and care for younger children or older relatives. Think about other ways in which they defy common stereotypes society may have of teenage boys. Is this true of lots of teens in real life, that they may be carrying responsibilities and burdens that no-one knows about? Does society have a problem with the assumptions it makes and the way in which it treats teens in general, race or gender aside?
- **Text to self-connection** There are several references to the ways in which friendships can change from primary to high school as people grow up and apart. Invite students to either discuss or write in their journals about their own experiences of this – in what ways do people grow apart, or change their interests, or leave friends behind as they grow up?
- Discuss the **motif** of Brandon's cat, Simba, who appears at Dylan's window in the lead up to the trial. What mood does this build up around the trial and what message or meaning could the cat's visits hold?

- At the end of Chapter 22, we receive the first real details of what actually happened on the night Brandon was killed. Discuss the author's choice not to disclose these details until now, and the effect this has had on the reader. Discuss how these brief details serve to **foreshadow** the trial that is about to begin.
- Discuss the author's use of **suspense** throughout the novel, and how the reader is often worrying about one thing happening when something else entirely unexpected happens. For example, when Dylan leaves Rory's house alone after testifying at the trial, the reader worries that Terry may appear and take him to his dug-up grave, but instead, police pull him over. In this moment, the reader then worries that Dylan will face the same fate as Brandon, but instead, Kallum's mum, an Aboriginal police officer, gets out of the car to comfort and help him. Similar situations are created when Jordy is meeting men through a dating app and when Jordy and Dylan break into a funeral home to film a scene in Dylan's film project. Discuss the effectiveness of this use of suspense throughout the novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – THEMES

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

Theme of police brutality/deaths in custody

- There is a rumour in the town about police officers taking Aboriginal kids and leaving them out in the bush. This reflects some of the real-life scenarios of police harassment or wrongdoing that repeatedly occur but are often discredited and dismissed, with the police officers being defended. One famous example is the 'Pinkenba Six', outlined in this archived news report: 'Police cleared of kidnapping three boys', *The Canberra Times*, 25 February, 1995.
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/133338141>.
Another more recent example is an incident where a boy was wrongfully accused and arrested on a Canberra bus: 'Police pulling Aboriginal teenager from bus at gunpoint was racial profiling, family alleges', ABC, 20 November, 2025.
www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-20/aboriginal-17yo-pulled-bus-gunpoint-mistaken-racial-profiling/106029782
Discuss with students, do we hear the same kind of brutality or abuse of power towards other members of society? Do the police explanations and justifications sound plausible? Do the alleged victims' claims sound plausible? Does the fact that we continue to see these sorts of incidents being taken to court and to the media indicate a real, ongoing, and unresolved issue?
- Discuss Dylan's account of the night Brandon died and the defence lawyer's questions and invite students' opinions on whether the officer was guilty of murder. Was the defence that they thought he was reaching for a weapon when he was reaching for his phone plausible? Does a minor deserve to die for allegedly stealing a sound system? Does the violent and urgent arrest match the crime of stealing a

sound system? In a small town where violent and dangerous criminals would be known to police, does it seem reasonable for them to arrest Brandon in this manner when he had no criminal record? Look at other real-life examples, such as Jai Kalani Wright as reported by the ABC in 2024.

www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-25/jai-kalani-wright-black-deaths-in-custody-/103507584

- Amnesty International's video explainer, 'Why is Australia locking up so many First Nations kids?' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5vXtYrFO-U) suggests that jails do not rehabilitate, but rather reinforce criminal behaviour, as well as denying basic human rights and causing more trauma to children who already have problems. Discuss the role of juvenile justice and what it should look like, using stimulus such as the above-mentioned video and excerpts from the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory. (https://rmo.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/731018/Royal-Commission-NT-Final-Report-Volume-2A.pdf), sparked by the ABC *Four Corners* report on Dylan Voller and the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre (www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-25/australias-shame-promo/7649462)
- Research and discuss how the Black Lives Matter movement began in the US and why it was adopted in Australia in 2020. To begin, see this overview 'Why does the BLM movement matter in Australia?' by the United Nations Association of Australia, 2021. www.unaa.org.au/2021/11/03/why-does-the-blm-movement-matter-in-australia/
- For further resources, see the Rapper Briggs report from inside juvenile detention – *The Guardian* article (www.theguardian.com/australia-news/video/2015/sep/10/rapper-briggs-reiby-juvenile-detention-indigenous-youth-vice-video), and the documentary, *In my blood it runs*, which challenges the 'inevitability' of Indigenous youth incarceration – *The Guardian* article (<https://theconversation.com/in-my-blood-it-runs-challenges-the-inevitability-of-indigenous-youth-incarceration-140624>) and teacher resource (<https://inmyblooditruns.com/>).

Theme of Racism

- Discuss the examples of racism highlighted in the novel:
 - Offensive comments made directly to Jordy by Terry and his brother Trent, including sexual harassment about him being gay, calling him a 'gay abo' and saying that's a 'double handicap', and saying that Aboriginal people were lucky that white people came to Australia (p. 150).
 - Chapter 21, when Dylan sees the graffiti at the shops 'WHITE POWER', the mixed responses of townspeople – some appalled, some looking the other way – the memory of racist incidents he was subjected to when he was younger by 'the rednecks', and his mother and sister's discussion about how their town is racist but people find it easier to pretend it's not. The helpless/hopelessness felt after Dylan and Jordan were abducted, assaulted and threatened by Terry, realising that it would be pointless to call the police: 'We can't go to the cops. They killed Brandon, not those dickheads.' (p. 223)

- Discussion Questions: Describe how you think the characters would feel facing these incidents. Are students aware of similar incidents occurring in their school, hometown, or online? How big a problem do they think it is in current-day Australia? Do students of other backgrounds experience similar? What can be done to prevent discrimination and bullying?
- For information about experiences of racism in Australia, read the annual reports from the 'Call it Out' National Justice Project (<https://callitout.com.au/resources/>) – the PPT Slides provide a clear and simple overview with key quotes. The quotes and stories are very confronting and it is recommended the teacher liaise with their supervisor and key First Nations staff and other school welfare personnel before sharing. If done sensitively, selecting information to share which is appropriate to the class context, it could provide some great discussion points and prompt some important realisations among the students.

Theme of Courage and Truth-telling

- Discuss how the characters feel when they have told the truth – Dylan at the trial, Jordy and Kallum about their relationship, and Kallum officially 'coming out', a sense that truth-telling will lead to good, and maybe terrible things won't happen at all.
- Discuss how the boys feel joining the community march to raise awareness about the court case, fighting for justice and an end to police brutality and deaths in custody. Consider the courage, strength and solidarity that being part of this community action gave them. Discuss the courage it takes to continually speak one's truth, stand up against injustice, and speak out against the majority and those in positions of power.

Theme of Hope

- Dylan wants to 'get drunk' and 'be numb' after the not-guilty verdict at the trial of the policeman who murdered Brandon, until he hears about his scholarship. At this point, when he knows he has opportunities and options ahead of him, he walks away from Rory's party. As he leaves to move to Sydney, he reflects that '*For the first time in a long time, I can finally imagine a future – a good one.*' (p. 293)

Discuss how important it is to have dreams, and to work towards them, as Kallum, Jordy and Dylan have. Discuss the difference that it can make for schools and employers to open up opportunities for those less able to access them due to poverty, geographical isolation or other barriers. Discuss how important 'hope' is for people to be able to have resilience against negative experiences in life. Discuss how easy it can be for people to turn to unhealthy coping behaviours such as drinking alcohol when faced with continual challenges, discrimination and harm: can students empathise with Dylan's initial reaction to the not-guilty verdict?

LGBTQIA+ Themes

- Invite students to reflect privately in their journals and then share comments in class if appropriate.
Prompt: have you ever been in a situation where a rude, ignorant, or discriminatory comment has been made and you've felt uncomfortable? (racist, sexist, homophobic, etc). How did you feel? Did you speak up against it?
- Invite students to now reflect on the characters in the novel and how they have managed their 'coming out'. Jordy who came out and generally ignores the homophobic abuse from Terry and Trent; and Kallum who kept it secret for a long time, tried dating girls hoping to '*realise he was straight*' and was part of the footy jock scene, hiding his true identity. How would these characters feel when homophobic remarks are made around them? What messages are they receiving about their place in society?
- How realistic is it to ask people to speak up and call out poor behaviour such as homophobia? What can make this a hard thing to do? What would help make this an easier thing to do?
- For teacher resources on tackling this topic, see Psych4Schools, Challenging Homophobia in the Classroom.
www.psych4schools.com.au/challenging-homophobia-in-the-classroom/
- **Extension activity** Research the effects of homophobia on LGBTQIA+ people. Create an infographic outlining key health and wellbeing impacts and tips on how to be an ally and take action to address this problem. See Beyond Blue (www.beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/LGBTIQ) and Headspace (<https://headspace.org.au/>) resources.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- Create a 2-5 minute film depicting two of the characters in the novel and their relationship with each other. Include their backstory (which can be made up if not known) and information about what they think of each other and how their relationship may have changed over time. It can be a montage with some re-enactments like Dylan's film, it can be a series of interviews, it can be an acting out of a scene, it can be a news-style report, or whatever the student comes up with. Include a storyboard, script and a 200-word rationale to explain your creative choices in the making of the film.
- Discussion essay: 'overpolicing' is the term referring to excessive, disproportionate use of police powers including excessive surveillance, unwarranted strip-searching and excessive force in reaction to a perceived threat. Discuss whether such an approach is effective in combating crime, using evidence from the novel as well as any non-fiction sources of your choice.
- Complete a collage/artwork representing the importance of community action in creating unity and promoting resilience and strength. Write a 200-word rationale to explain your creative choices and how they relate to the themes of the novel.

- 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.
- Create a playlist of songs that address an issue in the novel: relationship breakdown, loss of friendship, racism, homophobia, Aboriginal deaths in custody, family breakdown, injustice. Write an annotation for each song including its title, artist, date released, the meaning of the song, any key quotes from the song lyrics, key quotes from the artist about the song's message, and why you have selected this song to match the novel. Discuss specifically events in the novel, quotes or characters that you feel this song relates to.

Character Development: Close Analysis Task

Students are to create a character change map that visually and analytically represents how a character evolves throughout the novel. Students should:

1. Select a main character to analyse.
2. Identify 3-6 key moments in the novel where the character changes, grows or is revealed in a new way (we learn something new or different about them).
3. Select a key quotation for each moment.
4. Include:
 - Briefly – the context of the moment (what's happening in the story at that point)
 - What the quotation reveals about the character at this stage in the novel
 - Language analysis if relevant: key words, tone, imagery, symbolism that emphasises something about the character at this point
 - How the quotation shows development or transformation from earlier points
 - Compare how the character sees themselves versus how others see them
 - Why this change is significant to the novel's themes or message
 - How the character development links to the author's purpose
5. The map can be presented in any visually appealing and creative way the student chooses: ideas include an adapted street map, a series of different drawings/artworks with annotations, a character arc, a timeline, a concept map with branching changes, a digital presentation or poster.

Other useful teacher resources for this task are:

- How to create character arcs by Abbie Emmons
www.abbiee.com/2019/03/powerful-character-arcs/
- Character arcs in storytelling unit on Khan Academy
www.khanacademy.org/humanities/hass-storytelling/storytelling-pixar-in-a-box/ah-piab-character/v/character-4

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Year 10

Gender Stereotypes and Sexuality

- Discuss the homophobic insults used in the novel: 'snowflakes' (p. 85); harassment on the bus (p. 123). In what ways do these communicate gender stereotypes and expectations of how males should act? In what ways do these incidents make it unsafe for young people to explore their sexuality openly? What are the effects of this on LGBTQIA+ young people?
- Discuss how Kallum explores his sexuality – his fear of people's reactions, wanting to have a girlfriend and be straight but feeling bad about being dishonest with girls, using dating apps.
- Discuss the positive and negative representations of gender and sexuality in the novel, reflecting on the extent to which these reflect students' real-life experiences. The resources from Stonewall.com (www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/) are useful here.
- See the following resource from WA Department of Health for ideas on unpacking and discussing values about gender and gender stereotypes:
<https://gdhr.wa.gov.au/learning-activities/gender-expectations>

Respectful Relationships and Safety

- Discuss the potential risks Jordy and Kallum take when using dating apps: not knowing if they are talking to who they think they are talking to, the risks of going out to strange locations to meet men, the risk of catfishing and Kallum's experience in Sydney. What steps can be taken to make themselves safer in these situations? See classroom resources from the e-Safety commission (www.esafety.gov.au/educators/classroom-resources).
- Discuss the secret relationship between Eric and Jordy. Is this healthy? Is it respectful and safe? Why or why not? Discuss what strategies someone could use if they found themselves in this situation.
- Discuss the pregnancy situation between Eric and Rita (chapters 13-14). Do students agree with Eric's dad's position (that he has to get a job and support Rita to have the baby) or Amber's position (she should get an abortion – they're ruining their lives). What other options do they have? When contraception is readily available, and information about avoiding pregnancy is taught in schools, why do such situations still occur? Is there more that can be done to address this and prevent accidental pregnancies occurring?
- Discuss the scene where Jordy decides not to proceed with a meet-up, listening to his gut and his feelings of unease (p. 142). Did he do the right thing? Are there any other ways he could have handled this? Note that in this scene, Jordy thinks about a time when he was truly happy, and identifies that acting is what gives him true

happiness and fulfilment. This spurs him on to get more involved in acting again, taking up the invitation to act in Dylan's film. Discuss this in terms of the effective strategies Jordy is using to help him move past his heartbreak of breaking up with Eric and steer away from unhealthy coping responses such as going into risky situations meeting strange men.

- Discuss the way in which Jordy handles consent and setting boundaries he is comfortable with in his meet-up with Joe (p. 162). Discuss other ways to handle a situation like this and what to do if the partner does not listen or pushes against your boundaries.

ASSESSMENT: RESEARCH TASK

In pairs or small groups, choose a community issue highlighted in the novel that is of importance to you: racism, homophobia, gender and sexuality, 'coming out', respectful relationships, teen pregnancy, police brutality/overpolicing and Aboriginal deaths in custody, bullying.

Create an infographic using key examples and quotes from the novel as well as non-fiction sources to raise awareness of the issue and outline steps we can take as a society to address it. Include the contact details of support services people can access for help if they are dealing with this issue.

Students can present their findings in an oral presentation to the class.

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

- Encourage students to reflect on the issues raised, see them as important for all Australians to be aware of and address, and discuss steps everyone can take to take action in their community.

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 in class discussion.

HASS: HISTORY AND CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP

Year 10

Activities

- The activities outlined earlier in this guide under the theme of police brutality/deaths in custody could be expanded on in HASS, particularly looking in greater detail at the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (https://rmo.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/731018/Royal-Commission-NT-Final-Report-Volume-2A.pdf), sparked by the ABC *Four Corners* report (www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-25/australias-shame-promo/7649462) on Dylan Voller and the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre.

- Research and discuss how the Black Lives Matter movement began in the US and why it was adopted in Australia in 2020. Compare it to information about the 1965 'Freedom Rides' (<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/1965-freedom-ride#:~:text=In%201965%2C%20a%20group%20of,New%20South%20Wales%20country%20towns.>) that were also inspired by civil rights activism in the US (The National Museum of Australia has a useful digital resource: <https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/learning-modules/rights-and-freedoms-defining-moments-1945-present/18-1965-freedom-ride>). What has changed or improved between 1965 and 2020? What still needs to be addressed?
- Research 2-3 famous Indigenous Australian sportspeople, artists, bands/singers who have taken social action to fight for justice and equality, rights and freedoms. Outline the years they have worked, the work they have done and key quotes/important things they have said. Examples include: (AUS) Adam Briggs, Adam Goodes, Archie Roach, Rachel Perkins, Larissa Behrendt, Terry Janke, Mick Dodson, Eddie Betts, Jonathan Thurston, Cathy Freeman, Nakkiah Lui, Stephen Oliver, Deborah Mailman, Leah Purcell, Linda Burney. Students can present their findings in the format of an article in *The Guardian*.

ASSESSMENT: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

As discussed in the introduction to this novel, the reference to Sydney Rabbitohs and Redfern when Kallum is in Sydney for a football scholarship reflects an important link between First Nations sportspeople and activism for First Nations rights.

Complete an annotated bibliography compiling key sources on the significance of First Nations activism through sport.

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

Resources to support include:

- State Library of QLD Curriculum Connect: search for Indigenous sport and you will find a series of units on 'sporting heroes as changemakers' and 'leaders in social change'
<https://curriculumconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/search?keyword=indigenous sport&sort=rel>
- Michael Long and the Long Walk:
<https://www.michaellongfoundation.org.au/about/michael-long>
- Adam Goodes and Michael O'Loughlin: <https://www.gofoundation.org.au/founders>
- Preston Campbell: <https://pcfoundation.org.au/>
- Jonathan Thurston: <https://jtacademy.com.au/>

- Cathy Freeman: PMF Foundation
https://www.pmfoundation.com.au/community-spirit-foundation#:~:text=The%20Community%20Spirit%20Foundation%2C%20formerly%20known%20as,services**%20*%20**Cultural%20security**%20*%20**Local%20lens**
- Videos on how sport can create social change:
<https://www.vicsport.com.au/inclusion/first-nations>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GARY LONESBOROUGH is a Yuin man who grew up on the Far South Coast of NSW as part of a large and proud Aboriginal family. Gary was always writing as a child, and continued his creative journey when he moved to Sydney to study at film school. Gary has experience working in youth work, Aboriginal health, child protection, the disability sector (including experience working in the youth justice system) and the film industry. His young adult novels, *The Boy from the Mish* and *We Didn't Think It Through*, have won and been shortlisted for numerous awards, and his most recent novel, *I'm Not Really Here*, won the CBCA Book of the Year award for Older Readers.

<https://garylonesborough.com/>

IN THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR

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

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

Lonesborough, G. 2021. 'I stopped reading because I couldn't see myself in books. So I wrote one instead', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2021,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/01/i-stopped-reading-because-i-couldnt-see-myself-in-books-so-i-wrote-one-instead>>

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Cara Shipp is a Wiradjuri/Welsh woman (descending from the Lamb and Shipp families in Central Western NSW, around Dubbo, Parkes and Trangie) and currently school pedagogy coach for Big Picture Learning Australia. From 2018-2024 she was Head of Senior School at Silkwood School, Gold Coast, QLD. She has previously run alternative educational programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; held Head Teacher English/HASS/Languages positions; and served as President, Vice President and Editor with the ACT Association for the Teaching of English (ACTATE). Cara has completed a Master of Education focusing on Aboriginal literacy and regularly presents cultural competence training at local and national conferences, particularly within the context of incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the English curriculum. She has a blog on the topic:

<https://misshipp.wordpress.com/>

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

(In alphabetical order of authors)

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

Gary Lonesborough, *The Boy from the Mish*, with upcoming [unit of work](#) by Reading Australia

Gary Lonesborough, *We didn't think it through*, with teachers notes available at [Allen & Unwin](#)

Sue McPherson, *Brontide*, with upcoming [unit of work](#) by Reading Australia and teachers' notes by [Magabala Books](#)

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

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

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

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

OTHER RESOURCES

State Library of Queensland, Sovereign Stories online resource: Teacher resource for key books by First Nations authors published under the black & write! Initiative

<https://curriculumconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/educators/teaching-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

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

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

<https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sector/monitoring-and-reviewing-systems/young-people-in-youth-justice/yarning-for-change>

Human Rights Commission 'It stops with me' campaign

<https://humanrights.gov.au/know-your-rights/rights-of-individuals/race-discrimination/racism-it-stops-me-campaign-relaunch>

ONLINE LINKS IN FULL

First Nations Sport, Leadership and Social Change

- State Library of Queensland – Curriculum Connect, *Indigenous sport: Sporting heroes as changemakers; Leaders in social change*
<https://curriculumconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/educators/teaching-resources/first-nations-sporting-heroes>
- Michael Long Foundation, *Michael Long and the Long Walk*
<https://www.michaellongfoundation.org.au/about/michael-long>
- GO Foundation, *Founders: Adam Goodes and Michael O’Loughlin*
<https://www.gofoundation.org.au/founders>
- Preston Campbell Foundation
<https://pcfoundation.org.au/>
- Johnathan Thurston Academy
<https://jtacademy.com.au/>
- Cathy Freeman Foundation (formerly PMF Foundation)
<https://www.cathyfreemanfoundation.org.au/>
- VicSport, *First Nations inclusion: Videos on how sport can create social change*
<https://www.vicsport.com.au/inclusion/first-nations>

Youth Justice, Incarceration and Social Movements

- Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory
<https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/child-detention>
- ABC Four Corners, *Australia’s Shame (Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and Dylan Voller)*
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-25/australias-shame-promo/7649462>

United Nations Association of Australia (2021), *Why does the Black Lives Matter movement matter in Australia?*
<https://www.unaa.org.au/2021/11/03/why-does-the-blm-movement-matter-in-australia/>
- Amnesty International Australia, *Why is Australia locking up so many First Nations kids?* (Video explainer)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5vXtYrFO-U>

Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and Policing

- ABC News (2025), *More than 600 Aboriginal deaths in custody since the royal commission*
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-29/600-aboriginal-deaths-in-custody-since-the-royal-commission/105567164>

- Common Ground, *Deaths in custody*
<https://www.commonground.org.au/article/deaths-in-custody>
- ABC News – Topic Collection, *Black deaths in custody*
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/topic/black-deaths-in-custody>
- National Library of Australia (Trove), *Police cleared of kidnapping three boys (Pinkenba Six)*, *The Canberra Times*, 25 February 1995
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/133338141>
- ABC News, *Police pulling Aboriginal teenager from bus at gunpoint was racial profiling*
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-20/aboriginal-17yo-pulled-bus-gunpoint-mistaken-racial-profiling/106029782>

LGBTQIA+ Issues, Safety and Wellbeing

- Stonewall UK, Education resources
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources>
- Government of Western Australia – Gendered Health and Development, Gender expectations learning activities
<https://gdhr.wa.gov.au/learning-activities/gender-expectations>
- Australian eSafety Commissioner, Classroom resources
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/educators/classroom-resources>
- Beyond Blue, LGBTQIA+ mental health and wellbeing
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>
- Headspace, Support for LGBTQIA+ young people
<https://headspace.org.au/>

Literacy, Storytelling and Classroom Resources

- Abbie Emmons, *How to create character arcs*
<https://www.abbieemmons.com/blog/character-arcs>
- Khan Academy, *Character arcs in storytelling*
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/storytelling>
- Culturally Sensitive Teaching, Adapted from a presentation to the International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE), 2020
<https://missshipp.wordpress.com/culturally-sensitive-teaching/>

Aboriginal History, Community and Culture

- National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), Empowered Communities – Redfern

<https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/culture-and-empowering-communities/empowered-communities-ec>

Civil Rights, Human Rights

- Australian Human Rights Commission, *It Stops With Me* – National anti-racism campaign
<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/>