

## Jack's Island Norman Jorgensen

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### Synopsis

Jack Jones lives with his family on an island off the coast of Western Australia, where his father is employed as a labourer building the new aerodrome. Set during World War II, the plot of *Jack's Island* unfolds in a series of episodes; some hilarious, others deeply moving. Jack's inquisitive, often impulsive nature leads him into adventures all over the island, always in the company of his best friend, Banjo. His experiences, and those of his neighbours, show Jack the human capacity for courage and kindness in difficult circumstances.

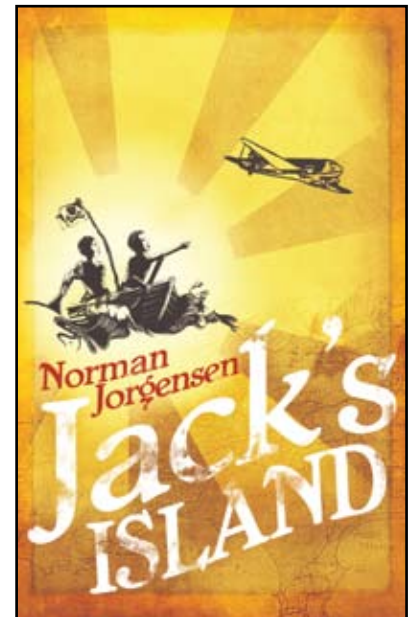
The novel is funny and affectionate, without ever trivialising the hardships of war and the lasting effects of the Great Depression. Teachers who have enjoyed working with Tim Winton's *Lockie Leonard* series will find that *Jack's Island* has the same broad appeal, and provides an ideal vehicle for exploring narrative and literary conventions, historical context, and a range of issues.

### Before Reading

Even before they have been taught the concept of **genre**, students can make predictions about the genre of *Jack's Island*. Ask questions such as:

- What do you think of when you hear the word 'island'? List as many words and phrases as you can.
- Have you read or viewed texts that include 'island' in the title, or which are set on islands? What kinds of stories are these? (Examples include *The Coral Island* by R.M. Ballantyne, (which is referred to in *Jack's Island*), *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, and *The Island of Adventure* by Enid Blyton.)
- Look at the cover of *Jack's Island* and record predictions about the novel, based on the title, cover illustrations and blurb.
- How do you think this story will be similar or different to the other 'island' texts you have come across? Give reasons for your answers.

### Historical Context



In writing the text, Norman Jorgensen drew on the experiences of his father, who lived on Rottnest Island during the Second World War. Although it is now a popular tourist destination, at that time Rottnest was seen to play a vital role in the defence of the port of Fremantle, the major base for the Allies in the Indian Ocean. The events in *Jack's Island* take place as the island is being prepared for the exclusive use of the military, amidst fears of a Japanese attack.

Suggested activities:

- As a class, brainstorm the facts students already know about World War II, particularly as it affected Australians. In the process, record questions students have about the war.
- In the library, have students use books and websites to check the accuracy of their information and seek answers to their questions.
- Ask students if they know anyone who was alive during World War II. Have students conduct interviews, or invite them to speak to the class about their memories.
- As a class, have fun immersing yourselves in the culture of Australia in the 1940s, experience the popular music, radio, dances, films and fashions of the time. A simulation game could be an excellent way to help students empathise with the more difficult experiences of rationing, loss of loved ones, fear of invasion and so on.

## As You Read Narrative and Literary Conventions

*Jack's Island* is an example of an engaging story in which the author has employed a range of techniques to convey humour, insight and depth of feeling. As well as an introduction to narrative conventions, the novel provides a useful model for students' own creative writing.

Suggested activities:

- Study **literary techniques** in a chapter of *Jack's Island* and ask students to use them to write a recount of a personal experience. (This could also make a good oral presentation activity.) In 'Racing the Trolleys' (p.37-42) students will find examples of a number of ways to add credibility and colour to an anecdote:
  - p.37 - detailed description of Mr Carter's truck
  - p.39 - rhetorical questions create suspense as Jack tries to decide what to do
  - similes throughout the chapter, eg. "he slapped at the water like a seal" (p.41)
  - dialogue throughout the chapter (especially Mr Carter's speech)
  - description that employs senses other than sight, eg. "the smell was bad enough to stun a mallee bull" (p.38), "Every bump shuddered up into my seat" (p.39), "The roaring of the wheels sounded just like ... Beaufort bombers" (p.39).
- Explore **narrative point of view** by discussing the feelings, motives and attitudes of characters other than Jack. Students could retell an episode from the novel from a different character's perspective. Eg. 'The Ferry Ride' told by Mr or Mrs Jones, 'Racing the Trolleys' told by Mr Carter, 'Sailing the Canoe' told by Little Eric, or 'Banjo Leaves' told by Banjo.
- Ask students to plot the key events of the novel onto the map provided in the front of

the book. As a class, explore the significance of the island **setting** (and perhaps introduce the concept of **symbolism**).

- Ask students to search the text for words and expressions that they think are old-fashioned or uniquely Australian. Provide definitions of the terms '**idiom**' and '**register**'. Ask students to consider the ways in which their own speech varies depending on context, purpose and audience, and to practise conveying the same information in different ways.

## After Reading

- Revisit the concept of **genre**.
- Ask students whether the novel reminds them of other stories they know and discuss their responses.
- Give students a list of genres and ask them which labels best apply to *Jack's Island*. Discuss the reasons for their answers.

The following questions will help students to reflect on the novel's **themes**:

- The blurb on the back cover says, "the hardships of war and entrenched prejudices on the time cast a long shadow". Find examples of "hardships of war" and "prejudices" in the text. How do you respond to these? How do they shape Jack's character?
- Jack is in his last year of primary school, about to become a teenager. Many stories with characters of this age are 'rite of passage' stories. How does Jack grow and change as the story progresses? How do you think the events in the novel may help to prepare him for adult life?
- How does the author show readers the importance of members of a community helping one another? Find and discuss specific examples of characters helping one another.
- What kinds of qualities and actions are portrayed as admirable or heroic in the novel? How do these compare to your ideas of heroism?