



# GROWING UP QUEER IN AUSTRALIA

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# Teaching notes

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Themes: identity and belonging, queer culture, self-acceptance,  
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## Section A

### *Synopsis and learning activities for before reading*

## SYNOPSIS

*Growing Up Queer in Australia* traverses the rich landscape of contemporary queer identities. The tales show the ways that individuals and communities have battled against the odds to make space for themselves. Telling stories that span well over seventy years, the writers map the changes that they have seen in the physical, psychological and emotional safety afforded to young queer people in Australia. Many of the writers sit at the intersections of complex experiences, negotiating their queer identities alongside their experiences as members of other marginalised communities. The writers shape and reclaim language to write the stories that they wish had been told to them as young people struggling to find themselves represented in popular culture.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR BEFORE READING

- ♦ What are the connotations of the title of the collection, *Growing Up Queer in Australia*?
- ♦ Create a timeline of attitudes to same-sex attraction and transgender identity in Australia.
- ♦ What aspects of history and contemporary politics may shape a reader's understanding of *Growing Up Queer in Australia*? Consider:
  - ▶ the policing of same-sex sexuality
  - ▶ the medicalisation of same-sex attraction and gender identity
  - ▶ religious attitudes to sexuality and gender identity
  - ▶ the evolution of key terms used in the book including gender, sexuality, queer and transgender
  - ▶ the debate over the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

## Section B

### *Questions for reading*

#### 'Freedom of Heart' by Holly Throsby

- ♦ Why was it important to Throsby that she was 'perfectly normal and fine'?
- ♦ What was the impact of queer women being like 'the Easter Bunny or a unicorn'?
- ♦ Why was Throsby surprised by the confidence of other young women in their sexuality?
- ♦ What was the impact of Throsby not being 'free in [her] heart'?
- ♦ Why did Throsby '[suffer] the judgement of some prouder queers'?
- ♦ How might the need to constantly be 'reading the room' impact queer people?

#### 'Shame and Forgiveness' by David Marr

- ♦ Why did Marr see religion as a potential saviour?
- ♦ What was the impact of experiencing 'first shame and then forgiveness'?
- ♦ Why does Marr believe that 'a young homosexual is particularly easy pickings'?
- ♦ Why did Marr freeze with 'curiosity and terror' when Dr Day discussed the characteristics of homosexuals?
- ♦ How does Marr perceive the role of shame in the Catholic Church?
- ♦ What are the implications of Marr's decision to 'try to live as [himself]'?

#### 'How to be Both' by Giselle Au-Nhien Nguyen

- ♦ In what ways are the figures in Nguyen's story simultaneously accepted and shunned?
- ♦ Why was bisexuality a 'foreign concept' when Nguyen was growing up?

- ♦ What are the implications of the connection Nguyen makes between homophobia and humour?
- ♦ Why does Nguyen fear that she has buried a part of herself 'somewhere so deep, so secret, that [she] couldn't find it'?
- ♦ Why was raising children in a new country a 'constant lesson' for Nguyen's mother?
- ♦ What 'unlearning' did Nguyen have to undertake?

#### 'Rob, and Queer Family' by Nayuka Gorrie

- ♦ How did Gorrie come to conclude, when they were growing up, that 'being queer was bad'?
- ♦ Gorrie's mother is surprised that they 'bothered' coming out to her as 'bi'. Why do you think it was important to Gorrie to do so?
- ♦ Gorrie describes queerness as 'coded' in popular culture. What figures do they cite as being significant markers of queerness?
- ♦ Gorrie reflects on 'how important queer people are to keeping families functioning' – what role did Rob play and how does this contrast with earlier experiences of queers in Gorrie's family?
- ♦ Gorrie reflects on being black and queer: what observations do they make about white queers?
- ♦ Why do you think it's particularly important to Gorrie to identify not just as queer, but with the black queer community?

#### 'Caritas' by Jack Kirne

- ♦ Why was Kirne's school 'a dangerous place to be gay'?
- ♦ What is the irony of boys playing 'gay chicken'?
- ♦ Why had others 'deduced' Kirne's sexuality?
- ♦ What is the significance of Kirne knowing the truth about his sexuality 'in that moment'?
- ♦ How does Kirne learn that words 'are dangerous, terrible things'?
- ♦ What was the 'distance between' Kirne and Tan?

#### 'St Louis' by Oliver Reeson

- ♦ Why didn't Reeson come out?
- ♦ What are the limitations of not having a 'story'?
- ♦ What are the implications of Reeson's view that identity is 'a sort of constant growing up, a perpetual becoming, a continued reinvention'?
- ♦ How might someone find 'the language to articulate [their] life perfectly'?
- ♦ Why was it difficult for Reeson to develop their sense of identity 'when it was not a story [they] had ever heard'?
- ♦ Why does Reeson believe that 'all identities, queer or not, are fictional stories'?

#### 'Boobs, Rags and Judy Blume' by Phoebe Hart

- ♦ Why was Hart so focused on developing breasts?
- ♦ What was the social impact of 'The Gang' passing milestones of female puberty?

- ♦ Why did Hart spend 'a lot of time making sure [the sleepover] would all go perfectly'?
- ♦ What are the implications of the protective parenting Hart experienced?
- ♦ Why did Hart take 'many years' to understand what it meant to be intersex?
- ♦ Why does Hart move through 'shame, loss, discovery and, finally, pride'?

#### 'From Dreams to Living' by Nadine Smit

- ♦ To what extent did the fact that 'no one knew [Smit's] brain thought [she] was a girl' shape her childhood?
- ♦ How do social expectations shape Smit's journey?
- ♦ What are the impacts of the suicidal thoughts that Smit had growing up?
- ♦ Why did taking hormones make Smit 'much happier and surprisingly calm'?
- ♦ Why did Smit's friend have to undergo a 'mourning process'?
- ♦ What is the significance of Smit's mum 'nearly always [using her] correct name these days'?

#### 'The Most Natural of Things' by Justine Hyde

- ♦ Why does Hyde wonder if her desires are 'normal'?
- ♦ What are the impacts for Hyde of not knowing anyone who is queer?
- ♦ Why does Hyde watch the queers that she sees in the city for 'clues on how to be'?
- ♦ What are the implications for Hyde of 'finally being let in on a secret'?
- ♦ Why does 'hiding [herself] in plain sight' take so much energy?
- ♦ What are the impacts of the 'incremental act[s] of erasure' that Hyde must undertake?

#### 'Binary School' by Roz Bellamy

- ♦ Why is Bellamy drawn to those who are 'different in some way'?
- ♦ In what ways does Bellamy 'struggle with ... rigid binaries'?
- ♦ How does Bellamy's sexuality and gender identity impact on their Jewish identity?
- ♦ How does university offer Bellamy 'anonymity and freedom'?
- ♦ Why does access to queer terminology make Bellamy feel 'less alone'?
- ♦ Why does Bellamy not want to 'have it any other way'?

#### 'Why I've Stopped Coming Out to My Mum' by Vivian Quynh Pham

- ♦ What are the implications of there not being 'a word in Vietnamese' for Pham's relationship?
- ♦ How does the Catholic Church shape Pham's childhood?
- ♦ Why did Pham want to support the 'brilliant woman' that she met?
- ♦ What are the unique circumstances of 'coming out to a non-white mum'?
- ♦ Why is there 'no shared cultural narrative for being gay and Vietnamese'?
- ♦ Why does Pham see the closet as a place of 'suffering, shame and failure'?

‘Training to Be Me’ by Cindy Zhou

- ◆ Why did Zhou mislead her mother about her afternoon activities?
- ◆ Why did Zhou feel that the ‘illusion would have to shatter’?
- ◆ What does Zhou identify with the saying: ‘*the nail that sticks out gets hammered in*’?
- ◆ Why does Zhou ‘absorb’ her parents’ ‘vitriol’?
- ◆ How do educators ‘form a silent safety net around vulnerable children’?
- ◆ Why does Zhou know that ‘it’s going to be okay’?

‘The Watering Hole’ by Samuel Leighton-Dore

- ◆ In what ways was Leighton-Dore’s early sexuality shaped by humiliation?
- ◆ Why did Leighton-Dore convince himself that ‘erections were [his] body’s way of expressing disgust’?
- ◆ Why was Leighton-Dore’s sexual awakening ‘slow’?
- ◆ What were the implications of a pre-Grindr world for young people?
- ◆ Why does Leighton-Dore feel that swimming pools have ‘become the great Australian equaliser’?
- ◆ In what ways does Leighton-Dore’s experience of swimming evolve as he ages?

‘Car Windows’ by Tim Sinclair

- ◆ How has Sinclair learnt to avoid showing fear in the face of homophobia?
- ◆ Why did Sinclair spend so long ‘waiting for somebody to give [him] the tick of approval’?
- ◆ Why does Sinclair feel that he is ‘from neither one world nor another’?
- ◆ What are the implications of Sinclair questioning who he might become?
- ◆ Why does Sinclair find labels problematic?
- ◆ Who are the young people that Sinclair thinks about?

‘Bent Man Running’ by Steve Dow

- ◆ Why did taking the lead in a running race elevate Dow’s social stature?
- ◆ How does Dow conform to the ‘stereo-tropes of unmanly awkwardness’?
- ◆ What is the irony Dow alludes to in stating that he ‘brought the bullying upon [himself]’?
- ◆ Why did Dow feel that gay liberation was not relevant to his life?
- ◆ Why does Dow’s former bully change his attitude?
- ◆ Why does Dow feel that he needs to ‘stop running now’?

‘The Bent Bits Are the Best Bits’ by Jax Jacki Brown

- ◆ How do assumptions around disability impact Brown’s relationships as a child?
- ◆ What early experiences does Brown have of social shaming?
- ◆ In what ways does Brown question gender norms as an adolescent?
- ◆ How does learning about the social model of disability transform Brown’s perceptions of disability?
- ◆ How does Brown seek to reconnect with their body?
- ◆ What are the elements of ‘pride, love, community’ that Brown finds?

‘Reunion’ by Kelly Parry

- ◆ Why did Parry believe that she wouldn’t ‘make it to a fortieth school reunion’?
- ◆ How did Parry experience gender roles as a child?
- ◆ In what ways did Parry’s ‘instincts for self-preservation’ shape her experience as an adolescent?
- ◆ Why were the early 1980s ‘a magic time in the land of gay’?
- ◆ What impact did Parry’s ‘internal homophobe’ have on her life?
- ◆ Why did Parry choose ‘the terror and wonder of freedom’?

‘You Can Take the Queer Out of the Country’ by M’ck McKeague

- ◆ Why does McKeague feel that ‘complexities and contradictions [are] so frequently erased in dominant queer and trans narratives’?
- ◆ What is the impact of reliving ‘our histories to rewrite them’?
- ◆ Why do some people feel that ‘memories legitimise’ them?
- ◆ How does McKeague feel that being ‘ashamed of your own story’ limits you?
- ◆ What are some of the ‘reductive and classist’ assumptions that McKeague criticises?
- ◆ Why does McKeague seek to rehabilitate rural and regional Australia in the face of stereotypes within the queer community?

‘The Risk’ by Thom Mitchell

- ◆ What are the implications of not being allowed to ‘*grow up* queer in Australia’?
- ◆ How does heterosexuality ‘[guard] its supremacy’?
- ◆ According to Mitchell, why was accepting yourself as gay ‘self-destructive’?
- ◆ Why did Mitchell ‘ghost’ Roy?
- ◆ How does Mitchell’s depression shape his interactions with his mother as an adult?
- ◆ Why does Mitchell think that ‘sometimes hiding is wise’?

‘When Worlds Collide, Words Fail’, by Thinesh Thillainadarajah

- ◆ Why is Thillainadarajah ‘unable to bridge a canyon’s worth of vocabulary’ between him and his father?
- ◆ Why is ‘private tolerance – even private acceptance ... still public shame’?
- ◆ In what ways did Thillainadarajah’s queer identity take him away from both his family and his Tamil identity?
- ◆ What does it mean that Thillainadarajah betrays himself ‘into small silences’?
- ◆ Why does Thillainadarajah feel a drive to define himself *for* himself?
- ◆ What role does Thillainadarajah feel that visibility will play in his future?

Radelaide/Sadelaide by Gemma Killen

- ◆ What aspects of Adelaide’s character infuse Killen’s story?
- ◆ Why does Killen ‘burn with silence in the back of the car’?
- ◆ What are the ‘heteronormative romance narratives’ that Izzy resists?

- ♦ What role does the school's homophobia play in Killen's story?
- ♦ What is the impact of Killen's search for 'God's plan'?
- ♦ Why does Killen's mother believe that 'the best part happens after you lose faith in the design'?

#### LGBTI-Q&A William Yang

- ♦ What connection does Yang draw between his understanding of his Chinese and sexual identities?
- ♦ How did photography 'substitute for having sex' in Yang's life?
- ♦ What was the impact of Yang being recognised as gay by other gay people?
- ♦ How does Yang feel age discrimination impacts the gay community?
- ♦ What kind of changes does Yang feel have occurred in his lifetime?
- ♦ What message does Yang have for young people growing up queer?

#### LGBTI-Q&A Georgie Stone

- ♦ Why might Stone's family have prayed that she would 'end up gay, not trans'?
- ♦ What caused Stone's dad to change his attitude towards her identity?
- ♦ Why does Stone like 'the feeling of being taken at face value'?
- ♦ What aspects of privilege does Stone identify in her own life?
- ♦ Why does Stone feel that 'we need ... positive representation'?
- ♦ What behaviours does Stone see as useful in an ally?

#### LGBTI-Q&A Tony Ayres

- ♦ What silences did Ayres see in the community?
- ♦ What was the impact for Ayres of having 'no one to come out to'?
- ♦ How have Ayres's experiences of homophobia and racism intersected?
- ♦ Why does Ayres believe that 'nothing triggers gay men more than the accusation that they're racist'?
- ♦ What are the implications of Ayres's belief that 'desire is racialised for some men'?
- ♦ What cultural institutions reinforce racism in the queer communities?

#### LGBTI-Q&A Sally Rugg

- ♦ What did Rugg see as the difference between having sex with women and being queer?
- ♦ What fears did Rugg have before coming out?
- ♦ Why did Rugg feel that 'marriage equality was a sham'?
- ♦ What are the implications for Rugg of finding '[her] people'?
- ♦ Why did Rugg develop a 'hardened shell'?
- ♦ What are the implications of Rugg finding her 'chosen family'?

#### LGBTI-Q&A Kate McCartney

- ♦ Why does McCartney believe that 'people are a little bit more comfortable with binaries'?
- ♦ What are the implications of McCartney's family members and straight friends acting as if '[her] queerness never happened'?



- ♦ What does McCartney see as the benefit of representation?
- ♦ Why does McCartney feel that she should have been 'more honest' with herself?
- ♦ Why does McCartney struggle to 'fit in to one place'?
- ♦ What role has finding '[her] own space' played in McCartney's life?

### LGBTI-Q&A Christos Tsiolkas

- ♦ Why was Tsiolkas 'more conscious of being the wog at high school than [he] was of being the poofster'?
- ♦ What did Tsiolkas see as the importance of 'the first positive representations of a gay man on Western screens'?
- ♦ What role did writing play in Tsiolkas's 'growing up'?
- ♦ Why did moving out of home allow Tsiolkas to take on a 'gay identity'?
- ♦ What was the importance of Tsiolkas's conversation with Lisa's mum?
- ♦ What gift does Tsiolkas believe 'you get from being the outsider'?

### 'Coming In' by Joo-Inn Chew

- ♦ What does the early scene from Chew's childhood reveal about her?
- ♦ Why do you think Chew hid her early crushes? What messages had she already received from society?
- ♦ How do Chew's family react to her sexuality?
- ♦ What role do public marches and protests play in Chew's life?
- ♦ What do you think Chew means by 'coming in', as opposed to 'coming out'?
- ♦ What is the significance, for Chew, of the 'yes' result for marriage equality? Why is it particularly important to her?

### 'Androphobia' by Heather Joan Day

- ♦ Why did Day 'wake up every day with an ache in her stomach'?
- ♦ What are the implications for Day of being the only girl at her high school?
- ♦ Why is it significant that T sees their school as 'a lot better than his last school'?
- ♦ What is the impact of seeing trans villains in popular culture?
- ♦ Why does the boy who Day sees in the mirror look sad?
- ♦ In what ways does the belief that 'things will get a lot worse before they get better' counter dominant queer narratives?

### 'Living in a Fridge' by Michael Farrell

- ♦ Why does Farrell wonder if 'the conditions of queer adulthood are possible – or even desirable'?
- ♦ What were the effects of 'growing up secretive'?
- ♦ Why is the 'way we understand and tell our growing-up stories [getting] more diverse'?
- ♦ What role did pop music play in Farrell's life?
- ♦ Why is there 'a lot of pressure and anxiety around being normal' in small towns?
- ♦ Why do 'straight rites of passage mean nothing' to Farrell?

‘Wanting’ by Fiona Wright

- ♦ What are the core beliefs that Wright has held about desire?
- ♦ What was Wright trying to tell her parents by cutting her hair?
- ♦ What were some of the impacts of Wright’s illness?
- ♦ Why did Wright want to avoid the complexity of her desires?
- ♦ What was the result of ‘queer’ not being included in the acronym when Wright was growing up?
- ♦ Why are words so powerful for Wright?

‘Coming Out, Coming Home’ by Adolfo Aranjuez

- ♦ Why does Aranjuez feel that ‘being an international student is the ultimate form of travel’?
- ♦ What are the implications of Aranjuez’s parents feeling that ‘there’s no future for someone *so brilliant* in the Philippines’?
- ♦ What kinds of cultural dislocation did Aranjuez experience?
- ♦ Why is Aranjuez’s relationship with his family ‘replete with both affection and avoidance’?
- ♦ What role do migrant narratives play in the construction of Aranjuez’s identity?
- ♦ Why does Aranjuez feel that ‘there’s something compelling about the specific, intertwining experiences of queerness and migration’?

‘The Wall of Shame’ by Natalie Macken

- ♦ Why is Macken self-conscious about what adorns her bedroom walls?
- ♦ What are the implications of Macken realising that her sexuality is ‘not going anywhere’?
- ♦ What is the distinction between wanting to *be* someone and wanting to *be with* someone?
- ♦ Why does Macken emphasise knowing about her sexuality ‘on a cellular level’?
- ♦ What are some of the impacts of not having any ‘gay people in [her] orbit’?
- ♦ What does Macken hope to achieve by placing twenty-two boys and one woman on her wall?

‘Meinmasha’ by Atul Joshi

- ♦ What does Joshi outline as the extreme possible reactions to coming out?
- ♦ Why does Joshi believe that ‘every time we meet someone new it’s another moment of coming out’?
- ♦ What are some of the aspects of ‘growing up’ that don’t happen until well into adulthood?
- ♦ Why does Joshi first become conscious of the colour of his skin?
- ♦ Why did Joshi feel shame in high school?
- ♦ What are the impacts of the ‘masks’ that Joshi creates to hide his own ‘personal traumas’?

‘Kissing Brad Davis’ by Scott McKinnon

- ♦ What was the impact of McKinnon watching TV shows and movies that were ‘all of them straight’?
- ♦ What was it that McKinnon didn’t even know he missed, as a child?
- ♦ Why was the portrayal of queer relationships on screen ‘strictly for adults only’?
- ♦ What are some of the ‘further layers of absence’ that McKinnon identifies for queer kids of colour?
- ♦ Why was McKinnon attuned to the ‘two legs touching’ in *Starstruck*?
- ♦ Why is increased representation on the screen, even in kids television, so important?

‘Something Special’ by Rebecca Shaw

- ♦ Why does Shaw joke that being ‘mid-thirties ... is approximately six hundred in Queer Years’?
- ♦ Why does Shaw find it difficult to articulate her needs?
- ♦ What were the impacts of having a ‘tiny’ world when Shaw ‘discovered [her] queerness’?
- ♦ Why was it ‘still almost impossible for [Shaw] to say the truth’?
- ♦ Who are the people that Shaw feels ‘are out there waiting’ for young queer people?
- ♦ What is the impact of finding a ‘beautiful, diverse community’?

‘Floored’ by Nic Holas

- ♦ What was the impact of the ‘relatively cosmopolitan upbringing’ Holas experienced?
- ♦ What was Holas’s relationship to his masculinity growing up?
- ♦ Why was it important to Holas that his mother got a divorce?
- ♦ Why does Holas struggle to feel ‘entirely safe around heterosexual men’?
- ♦ What does Holas believe is the essence of growing up queer?
- ♦ What is Holas fighting for?

‘Not Special’ by Tim McGuire

- ♦ How does Timothy Conigrave’s *Holding the Man* influence McGuire’s adolescent identity?
- ♦ What role does the sex education curriculum play in shaping McGuire’s sexuality?
- ♦ What memories does McGuire have of the way that people understood HIV/AIDS as a teenager?
- ♦ Why did McGuire feel that becoming HIV positive was inevitable?
- ♦ How has the experience of being HIV positive changed during McGuire’s life?
- ♦ What is McGuire’s sister’s interpretation of his HIV status?



‘Jack and Jill and Me’ by Stephanie Convery

- ◆ In what ways do friendship and romance intersect in Convery’s life?
- ◆ Why did Convery resent the idea of coming out?
- ◆ What leads to Convery identifying as bisexual?
- ◆ Why does Convery believe that ‘being bisexual means being invisible’?
- ◆ Why does Convery characterise romance as ‘a narrative of power’?
- ◆ Why did Convery need to find ‘a way in which to speak about the past’ in order to ‘come to terms with Jack’s transition’?

‘To My Man of Seventeen Years’ by Henry von Doussa

- ◆ How did attitudes to homosexuality shape von Doussa’s childhood?
- ◆ Why does von Doussa reflect on his parents’ views with a mixture of hope and fear?
- ◆ What ‘must be cordoned off in the pursuit of belonging’?
- ◆ In what ways were von Doussa’s parents pushing ‘against the restrictions of previous generations’?
- ◆ Why did von Doussa move among the lockers of his high school in a ‘liminal zone’?
- ◆ What impact did fears of AIDS have on von Doussa’s mother?

‘Angry Cleaning’ by Nathan Mills

- ◆ Why did Mills ‘notice [his] differences first’?
- ◆ What was the impact of Mills’s relationship with his father being ‘defined by opposing politics and interests’?
- ◆ What did Mills see as the relationship between religion and his sexuality?
- ◆ Why did Mills hope that puberty would be his ‘saving grace’?
- ◆ What is it about queer childhood that Mills sees as ‘lonely’?
- ◆ Why did Mills see growing up queer as a ‘slow burn’?

‘The Exchange’ by Alice Boyle

- ◆ Why did Boyle ‘refuse to fold [herself] back into’ the closet?
- ◆ Why were ‘secrets [how Boyle] lived’?
- ◆ Why was Boyle ‘neither here nor there’ in France?
- ◆ What were the implications of Boyle ‘persisting with this gay business’?
- ◆ Why was having her ‘own shitty kitchen’ so important to Boyle?
- ◆ Boyle describes her queerness as having roots that ‘stretch far and deep and are inextricably buried in the soil of two continents’ – what does this mean for her?

‘Faggot’ by Beau Kondos

- ◆ Why is Kondos ‘a strong believer in the potency of words’?
- ◆ What relationship does Kondos have with the word ‘faggot’?
- ◆ Why does Kondos believe that ‘a movie like *Love, Simon* would have been a godsend’?
- ◆ Why did Kondos censor his online activity?
- ◆ Why does Kondos believe that bullied victims’ ‘trauma is relative’?
- ◆ Why does Kondos believe that there was ‘only pure submission’?

‘So You Wanted Honesty ...’ by Sue-Ann Post

- ◆ What made Post’s childhood ‘a profoundly lonely experience’?
- ◆ How did reading about homosexuality in *Abnormal Psychology* affect Post?
- ◆ What coded references to homosexuality did Post uncover when she reflected on her childhood?
- ◆ What does Post believe her subconscious brain was trying to protect her from?
- ◆ Why does Post believe that ‘the past is not fixed’?
- ◆ Why was ‘being the only out lesbian on stage’ a ‘double-edged sword’ for Post?

‘Sometimes I Call You Even Though I Know You Can’t Answer.

It’s a Symbol, I Think ...’ by Anthony Nocera

- ◆ How does film shape Nocera’s reflection on his sexuality?
- ◆ How did AIDS shape Nocera’s understanding of his first sexual experience?
- ◆ Why does Nocera interrogate whether or not he loves his boyfriend?
- ◆ How does symbolism feature in Nocera’s understanding of the past?
- ◆ What does Nocera’s memory of the conversation between his mother and the doctor suggest about his childhood?
- ◆ Why does Nocera thread a discussion about *Call Me by Your Name* throughout his essay?

‘How Not to Quench Your Thirst’ by Jean Velasco

- ◆ Why does Velasco ‘feel so much closer’ after the haircut?
- ◆ Why does Velasco struggle with the conversation over who is a ‘Tom-boy’?
- ◆ What meaning do customers take from Velasco’s shaved head?
- ◆ Why does Velasco question whether life out of the closet is any easier?
- ◆ Why does Velasco struggle with ‘limbo ambiguity’?
- ◆ What role has moving played in ‘dismantling ... long-held misconceptions’?

‘Silence and Words’ by Aron Koh

- ◆ Why does Koh feel that ‘love is easier as a dream’?
- ◆ How did travelling between countries shape Koh’s identity?
- ◆ What were the effects of Koh feeling that ‘difference had become a habit’?
- ◆ Why was Koh drawn to Matt?
- ◆ What are the implications of Koh’s grief being ‘deepened by some form of guilt’?
- ◆ Why does Koh still feel the ‘burden’ of the silence he carried with Matt?

‘homosexual’ by Mike Mullins

- ◆ What relationship does Mullins have to the vocabulary of the queer community?
- ◆ What impact did the monoculture of post-war Australia have on Mullins?
- ◆ Why was the playground a ‘place for torture’ for Mullins?

- ♦ Why did Mullins have ‘a desire to be accepted’?
- ♦ How did coming of age as a homosexual in the 1960s and 1970s shape Mullins?
- ♦ What impact did the same-sex marriage vote have on Mullins’s sense of identity?

#### ‘A Robust Game of Manball’ by Patrick Lenton

- ♦ What sense of commonality did Lenton find while studying creative writing?
- ♦ Why did Lenton feel alone when his classmates had a ‘no men’ night?
- ♦ Why did Lenton ‘lean in’ to the idea of spending time on a boys’ night?
- ♦ What role did ‘Manball’ have in developing Lenton’s sense of identity?
- ♦ Why was Lenton ‘lonely and closeted and scared’?
- ♦ What impact did Lenton’s fear of men have on his life?

#### ‘The Equality of Love’ by Yamiko Marama

- ♦ What are the range of responses to the same-sex marriage postal survey outlined in Marama’s writing?
- ♦ Why might Marama find it difficult to disentangle her relationship with Gina from a broader sexual identity?
- ♦ Why does Marama believe that ‘coming-of-age stories are not only for the teens’?
- ♦ Why does Marama now worry less about ‘meeting others’ expectations’?
- ♦ What made Marama believe that ‘being queer was something of a full-time job’?
- ♦ How does Marama see the discrimination of ‘liberal, middle-class progressives’?

#### ‘A City Set Upon a Hill’ by Dang Nguyen

- ♦ How did Nguyen experience his first trip to Vietnam?
- ♦ What did Nguyen learn from *Sailor Moon*?
- ♦ Why was Nguyen ‘exiled from the adolescent war council’?
- ♦ What role did the internet play in Nguyen’s development?
- ♦ Why did Nguyen find comfort in seeing two boys kiss at Flagstaff station?
- ♦ What impact did falling in love have on Nguyen’s life?

#### ‘Trust Me (Tips for My Teenage Self)’ by Thomas Wilson-White

- ♦ What attitudes to sex did Wilson-White develop as a teenager?
- ♦ How do Wilson-White’s relationships with his family evolve as he ages?
- ♦ What misconceptions does Wilson-White believe he had about himself?
- ♦ How does the absence of positive role models shape Wilson-White?
- ♦ How does heartbreak signal a coming of age for Wilson-White?
- ♦ Why does Wilson-White believe that ‘*it will always get better*’?



## Section C

### *Learning activities for after reading*

#### 1. THEMES

##### A. Identity and belonging

The writers in *Growing Up Queer in Australia* struggle with developing their sense of identity and the layers of their belonging in Australia.

1. Many of the writers in the text explore the notion of a delayed adolescence, resulting from being excluded from many of the mainstream rites of passage afforded to their peers. These writers find themselves exploring their identities well into their twenties, having beaten a path away from the restrictions of their childhood.
2. The collection explores the notion that many young people have no concept of what it may mean to 'grow up' queer. Without visible adult role models, many of the writers struggled to conceptualise an adult life that included them in it. This was often exacerbated by the fragile mental health that can come with sitting at society's margins.
3. Some of the writers maintained strict codes of secrecy as a protective mechanism, at least at some point in their lives. Their desires and identities were submerged, hidden beneath a performative exterior that allowed them to maintain the illusion of 'normalcy'. Breaking this silence often has significant costs with families and communities.
4. The text reflects the lack of representation for diverse gender identities and sexualities. Particularly true prior to the 2000s, many of the writers were further isolated by being confronted with only gaps and silences in the books they read and films they watched.

##### B. Ideas of family and community

*Growing Up Queer in Australia* reflects the gaps that can form between generations of families due to shifting social norms.

5. The text reflects the many complexities of building queer identities in biological families. The writers reflect on the vast array of reactions that people have to the affirmation of their queer identities. One common thread among the diverse pieces is the sense of fear that often accompanies the process of disclosing sexuality to biological family members.

6. The writers who sit at the intersections of marginalised communities have unique and complex stories to tell. At times, these writers are forced to challenge norms within the queer community itself. At other times, their efforts to belong can mean literally trading off aspects of their own identities. Linguistic, cultural and religious gaps can add layers of complication to these relationships.
7. Many of the writers tell tales of forming their own chosen families – people who reflect and embrace the diversity of the queer community. This sense of agency is bittersweet for many, often coming as the result of painful experiences within biological families.

### C. The importance of storytelling

8. Many of the writers explore the idea of ‘coming out’ – a process that has long defined what the mainstream has seen as the process of growing up queer. The collection problematises this narrative, looking at the ways it differs depending on the writer’s identity. Many in the collection also acknowledge the ongoing process of coming out that is an aspect of life for many queer people.
9. The text also explores the complexities of discussing queer identities, particularly when people lack a common vocabulary to narrate and understand their experience. For the writers whose families have recently migrated to Australia, this gap can be exacerbated even further, requiring linguistic dexterity to communicate facts central to their identity.

### D. The impacts of prejudice

10. *Growing Up Queer in Australia* reflects the way that significant social and cultural institutions like schools and religions have shaped society’s approach to queer identities. Many of the writers’ formative experiences were shaped inside these institutions, where the young people struggled to survive in fundamentally oppositional spaces. Often, articulating their identity came at the price of exclusion from these institutions.
11. The text also recounts the very real dangers that young people have faced in affirming their sexual or gender identities. The impact of this danger on their physical and mental health is one of the most significant and heartbreaking themes of the text.

## 2. EXTENDED ANALYTICAL RESPONSES

Students may be asked to respond analytically to the work in *Growing Up Queer in Australia*. Some possible essay questions:

- ◆ ‘*Growing Up Queer in Australia* reflects the ongoing struggles with prejudice in modern Australia.’ Discuss.
- ◆ *Growing Up Queer in Australia* illustrates the danger of the narrative of the ‘brave queer’. Do you agree?
- ◆ To what extent do the stories in *Growing Up Queer in Australia* reflect the desire of outsiders to find acceptance?
- ◆ *Growing Up Queer in Australia* reveals the dangers of normative beauty standards. Discuss.
- ◆ *Growing Up Queer in Australia* illustrates the impacts of homogenous queer narratives. Do you agree?
- ◆ For many of the writers in *Growing Up Queer in Australia*, silence is a place to find safety. Discuss.
- ◆ Many of the writers in *Growing Up Queer in Australia* do not ‘grow up’ until they are in their twenties. Discuss.
- ◆ *Growing Up Queer in Australia* shows that taking an unconventional path through puberty is difficult. Do you agree?
- ◆ *Growing Up Queer in Australia* shows the way that you can be tortured by your desires. Discuss.
- ◆ Many of the writers in *Growing Up Queer in Australia* move to the city to find their community. Discuss.
- ◆ To what extent do the writers in *Growing Up Queer in Australia* seek out and sympathise with other minority groups?
- ◆ The writers of colour in *Growing Up Queer in Australia* face additional challenges. Discuss.
- ◆ Fear is a central component of *Growing Up Queer in Australia*. Discuss.
- ◆ *Growing Up Queer in Australia* shows the ways that queer people are excluded from life’s milestones. Do you agree?
- ◆ How many of the writers of *Growing Up Queer in Australia* have formed their own families or found a supportive community?
- ◆ The institutions of society marginalise the writers in *Growing Up Queer in Australia*. Do you agree?

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