



GROWING UP IN AUSTRALIA

With an introduction
by ALICE PUNG

Tim Winton · Nyadol Nyuon · Magda Szubanski
Christos Tsiolkas · Rick Morton · Tara June Winch
Stan Grant · Anna Goldsworthy · Benjamin Law
and many more

Teaching Notes

Teaching notes

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Section A

Synopsis and learning activities for before reading

SYNOPSIS

Growing Up in Australia provides insight into the rich experience of coming of age on this land. The anthology reflects the universal experience of adolescence, beginning with the need to belong and a shifting sense of self. These pages also offer an acute understanding of the gap between our own identity and the way the world perceives us, particularly as we leave the relative innocence of childhood. The text also shines a light on the heterogeneous nature of adolescence; there is no one Australia, and there is no one experience of growing up. This work will provide young people with both a mirror and a magnifying glass. It is a true gift for classrooms everywhere.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR BEFORE READING

- ◆ What are the connotations of the title of the collection, *Growing Up in Australia*?
- ◆ Reflect on media interviews and reviews of the *Growing Up* series. How were the books received when they released? What is the significance, if any, of the order of their release?

- ◆ Create a timeline of the history of this land, beginning with the earliest recorded history of First Nations people. Consider events of particular importance to the authors featured in this collection, such as the waves of immigration to this land and the decriminalisation of homosexuality.
- ◆ Discuss what is unique about the experience of 'growing up'. How is it reflected in texts that students have studied throughout their schooling? What resonates with students, and what does not?
- ◆ What aspects of history and contemporary politics may shape a reader's understanding of *Growing Up in Australia*? Consider:
 - ▶ The White Australia Policy
 - ▶ Australia's changing attitude to disability
 - ▶ Patterns of immigration since British colonisation
 - ▶ The Racial Discrimination Act
 - ▶ Attitudes to sexuality and gender

Section B

Questions for reading

INTRODUCTION

- ◆ Why does Alice Pung open the introduction with the quote from Erik Jensen?
- ◆ What is the importance of time and power in Pung's understanding of adolescence?
- ◆ What are the connotations of 'The Great Australian Childhood'?
- ◆ How does literature shape the contributor's understanding of their lives?
- ◆ Why does Pung end the introduction with the quote from Oliver Reeson?

'TALKING TO MY COUNTRY' BY STAN GRANT

- ◆ Why does Stan Grant open his piece with the quote from W.E.H. Stanner?
- ◆ What are the 'myths' that characterised Grant's childhood?
- ◆ How does Grant's family understand the idea of 'home'?
- ◆ What is the relationship between the 'sweep of history' and 'individual lives' in Grant's work?
- ◆ What is the 'ladder of assimilation'?

'RECKONINGS' BY MAGDA SZUBANSKI

- ◆ What connections did the Szubanskis lack when they moved to Australia?
- ◆ Why were First Nations people 'spectacularly absent' from the Szubanskis' lives?
- ◆ What is the 'cruel irony' that Szubanski sees in the relationship between her family and Aboriginal land?

- ◆ How was Szubanski's father trying to 'tame' the land?
- ◆ Why does Szubanski see the bush as 'mythological'?

'PIANO LESSONS' BY ANNA GOLDSWORTHY

- ◆ Why did the 'Leningrad Conservatorium' seem so important to Anna Goldsworthy?
- ◆ How did Goldsworthy's body '[come] to understand' lessons?
- ◆ Why does a young Goldsworthy delight in the 'melodrama' of her situation?
- ◆ What are the connotations of a consciousness that expands in childhood?
- ◆ What is the relationship between translation and interpretation?

'TOURISM' BY BENJAMIN LAW

- ◆ Why did Benjamin Law's Mum declare that the family 'were never camping people'?
- ◆ Why did Law want to 'distinguish [himself] from the actual Asian tourists'?
- ◆ How did Law's mother seek to 'sabotage all [his] efforts to set [himself] apart'?
- ◆ What role do theme parks play in Law's childhood?
- ◆ In what ways is Law embracing Nostalgia Town's motto in his own writing?

'THE GAME IS TO HIDE' BY RICK MORTON

- ◆ What is the importance of Rick Morton's town having to petition for broadband internet?
- ◆ What are the implications of Morton's statement that he 'didn't know any gay people'?
- ◆ What is the relationship between 'awareness and causality' in Morton's work?
- ◆ What struggles does Morton have with belonging?
- ◆ How does Morton understand the process of coming out?

'HER MOTHER'S DAUGHTER' BY NYADOL NYUON

- ◆ What is the 'shameless indifference of war'?
- ◆ How does Nyadol Nyuon view the 'broken links of kinship'?
- ◆ What is the significance of the fact that Nyuon only knows of her father through the stories of others?
- ◆ Why do gaps develop between Nyuon and her mother?
- ◆ What are the implications of being a 'conditional citizen'?

‘EASTER, 1969’ BY KATIE BRYAN

- ◆ What are the implications of Katie Bryan’s father having secrets?
- ◆ Why does the phrase ‘kinship recognition’ strike fear in Bryan’s parents?
- ◆ What is the irony of Bryan’s father having fought in World War Two?
- ◆ Where do Bryan’s father and cousin find safety?
- ◆ In what ways do wealth, class, caste and colour intersect in Bryan’s world?

‘WEI-LEI AND ME’ BY ADITI GOVERNEL

- ◆ Why did Aditi Gouvernel’s family feel that they could ‘create a new identity’ in Australia?
- ◆ How did Gouvernel ‘[meet] Australia in the school playground’?
- ◆ What are the implications of Gouvernel’s classmates ‘[combining] their hatred in a human circle’?
- ◆ Why did Gouvernel look forward to Wei-Lei’s arrival at the school?
- ◆ How does Gouvernel gain agency in the story?

‘RED DUST, JET STREAMS AND CHANEL NO. 5’

BY GAYLE KENNEDY

- ◆ Why does Gayle Kennedy create her ‘own little world’ at the rehabilitation hospital?
- ◆ What are the implications of a young Kennedy claiming that her parents were not related to her?
- ◆ How did society limit her parents’ independence?
- ◆ In what ways did her family show her love?
- ◆ How did Kennedy develop her imagination and independence?

‘LAND’S EDGE’ BY TIM WINTON

- ◆ Why do the smells of the coast linger for Tim Winton?
- ◆ What role did the ‘mystery’ of the house play for Winton?
- ◆ How did books help Winton develop as a young man?
- ◆ What role does the climate play in Winton’s story?
- ◆ How does Winton characterise the pattern of his life?

‘HIPPO THERAPY’ BY ALASTAIR BALDWIN

- ◆ What role do horses play in Alastair Baldwin’s interactions with other people who grew up disabled in Australia?
- ◆ What is the significance of Baldwin being ‘in control of an able body’?
- ◆ Why is it ‘hard to assess progress or decline from inside a disability, especially as a child’?
- ◆ What are the connotations of the notion of ‘living a diluted version of childhood’?
- ◆ How is a horse’s value ‘linked to its ableness’?

‘BOOBS, RAGES AND JUDY BLUME’ BY PHOEBE HART

- ◆ Why does Phoebe Hart allude to the work of Judy Blume?
- ◆ What role does silence play in Hart’s characterisation of her mother?
- ◆ How does The Gang shape Hart’s development?
- ◆ How do Hart’s allusions to 1980s pop music create the scene for her story?
- ◆ What impact does Hart’s growing knowledge of intersex identities have on the story?

‘NOBODY PUTS BABY SPICE IN A CORNER’

BY MIRANDA TAPSELL

- ◆ Why has Miranda Tapsell always wanted to have control over her own identity?
- ◆ What does it mean to be an ‘intersectional feminist’?
- ◆ Why does Tapsell’s mother emphasise education in her family?
- ◆ What are the implications of Tapsell’s friends struggling to ‘navigate’ her Aboriginality?
- ◆ How does Tapsell try to build connections with her peers?

‘THE WALL OF SHAME’ BY NATALIE MACKEN

- ◆ What does Natalie Macken feel the posters on her wall symbolise?
- ◆ Why does Macken feel that her sexuality is ‘not going anywhere’?
- ◆ What are the implications of Macken listening to ‘Fast Car’ by Tracy Chapman?
- ◆ Why does Macken describe her sexuality as ‘the gay’?
- ◆ Why does Macken feel there is a difference on a ‘cellular level’?

‘THE LITTLE TOWN ON THE RAILWAY TRACK’

BY KERRY REED-GILBERT

- ◆ What is the importance of the new house to Kerry Reed-Gilbert’s family?
- ◆ Why is Reed-Gilbert’s family fearful of ‘the welfare’?
- ◆ What are the implications of the family’s attitudes to alcohol?
- ◆ How do events in the town change Reed-Gilbert’s perception of her home?
- ◆ What role does Constable Saunders play in the town?

‘SAM’ BY FAUSTINA AGOLLEY

- ◆ What is the relationship between Faustina Agolley’s questions and her mother’s answers?
- ◆ What are the implications of Agolley ‘knowing [her father’s] absence, instead of his stories’?
- ◆ Why does Agolley gravitate towards television as a child?
- ◆ How does Springvale function as a ‘home away from home’?
- ◆ How does the trip to Ghana inspire Agolley?

‘PERFECT CHINESE CHILDREN’ BY VANESSA WOODS

- ◆ What role do familial expectations play for Vanessa Woods?
- ◆ What relationship does Woods have to Cantonese?
- ◆ Why is divorce such a taboo concept for Woods and her family?
- ◆ How does Woods respond to the shame her mother feels?
- ◆ What are the implications of Woods ‘going the way of *Australian* children’?

‘BE GOOD, LITTLE MIGRANTS’ BY UYEN LOEWALD

- ◆ What is the implication of the narrator ‘saving’ the ‘little migrants’?
- ◆ What role does service play for ‘good, little migrants’?
- ◆ How does Uyen Loewald characterise Australia’s approach to migrants’ cultures?
- ◆ How does Loewald use repetition in the poem?
- ◆ What images does Loewald employ to depict the process of assimilation?

‘QUESTION MARKS AND A THEORY OF VISION’

BY ANDY JACKSON

- ◆ How does perspective shape a young Andy Jackson’s understanding of disability?
- ◆ What are the implications of Jackson’s mother being ‘stoic and uninterested in focusing on the negatives’?
- ◆ Why was Jackson willing to put himself ‘on show’?
- ◆ In what ways was Jackson’s spine ‘a kind of question mark’?
- ◆ Why would it be ‘reassuring to have a name for your difference’?

‘WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, WORDS FAIL’

BY THINESH THILLAINADARAJAH

- ◆ What is the catalyst for Thinesh Thillainadarajah’s worlds colliding?
- ◆ What is unique about ‘the love that only children of immigrant parents know’?
- ◆ Why do things get ‘lost in communication’ between Thillainadarajah and his parents?
- ◆ What is the relationship between ‘private tolerance’ and ‘public shame’ in Thillainadarajah’s story?
- ◆ How does Thillainadarajah depict the complex role of community?

‘I WAS BORN THIS WAY’ BY CARLY FINDLAY

- ◆ What is the significance of the interracial relationship between Carly Findlay’s parents?
- ◆ Why do Findlay’s parents need to be ‘resourceful’?
- ◆ What are the implications of the nuns’ practical support to the family?
- ◆ How did ‘internalised ableism’ shape Findlay’s life?
- ◆ What new perspective did Findlay develop as she aged?

‘POWER’ BY HOPE MATHUMBU

- ◆ How does Hope Mathumbu characterise the interracial friendships in Australia?
- ◆ What is the role of gender in Mathumbu’s story?
- ◆ What do hairstyles signify in Mathumbu’s story?
- ◆ How does the church shape the values evident in Mathumbu’s social network?
- ◆ What gaps exist between Mathumbu and her mother?

‘FOUR STAGES’ BY RAFEIF ISMAIL

- ◆ Why does Rafeif Ismail believe that ‘the worst thing about grief is the forgetting’?
- ◆ What are the particular characteristics of ‘grief in exile’?
- ◆ How does Ismail depict the shock of grief?
- ◆ What is the role of survivor’s guilt in Ismail’s story?
- ◆ What are the particular experiences of ‘child of diasporic heritages’ that Ismail outlines?

**‘A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG LARRIKIN’
BY LECH BLAINE**

- ◆ In what ways were Lech Blaine’s parents ‘pragmatic battlers’?
- ◆ Why was Blaine’s parents’ adoration ‘unsustainable’?
- ◆ How did gender norms shape Blaine’s childhood?
- ◆ Why does Blaine juxtapose creativity and solitude with popularity and profit?
- ◆ How do Blaine’s allegiances change as he ages?

‘ST LOUIS’ BY OLIVER REESON

- ◆ Who does Oliver Reeson believe has the authority to tell someone’s story?
- ◆ How does Reeson’s sense of identity evolve throughout the story?
- ◆ Why does Reeson struggle to find the words to ‘come out’?
- ◆ What is the cost of being ‘noticeable’?
- ◆ What are the implications of Reeson’s belief that ‘all identities ... are fictional stories’?

‘DON’T TOUCH ALCOHOL’ BY SARA EL SAYED

- ◆ What shared understanding does Sara El Sayed perceive between her father and the taxi driver?
- ◆ What does El Sayed notice about the bread in Australia?
- ◆ Why was El Sayed ‘nothing’ in Australia?
- ◆ What are the implications of El Sayed’s father not knowing what he had said to offend the women in the apartment complex?
- ◆ Why did El Sayed’s neighbour say that the family’s rubbish didn’t ‘belong in [their] street’?

‘COMING IN’ BY JOO-INN CHEW

- ◆ What are the implications of the title ‘Coming In’?
- ◆ How do the characters in the story reflect gender norms?
- ◆ Why does Chew characterise it as ‘luck’ that her parents accept her sexuality?
- ◆ Why is there ‘lust and revolution’ in the air for Chew?
- ◆ How does Chew believe that her world has changed since her childhood?

‘SELECTED EPISTLES’ BY OLIVIA MUSCAT

- ◆ Why does Olivia Muscat structure her piece as a series of letters?
- ◆ What are some of the normative attitudes that permeate Muscat’s experiences?
- ◆ How does Muscat reflect on how politeness has shaped her responses to a number of difficult situations?
- ◆ What commonalities does Muscat feel with the people that she has encountered throughout her life?
- ◆ In what ways does fire and fight shape Muscat’s response to the world she lives in?

**‘BULLY FOR THEM’ BY CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS,
AS TOLD TO FIONA SCOTT-NORMAN**

- ◆ Why does Christos Tsiolkas characterise his primary school years as a ‘charmed existence’?
- ◆ What impact did low expectations have on the community that Tsiolkas grew up in?
- ◆ How did ‘casual’ racism impact Tsiolkas?
- ◆ Why does Tsiolkas feel school plays such a significant role in people’s lives?
- ◆ What does Tsiolkas see as the cost of silence?

‘DEAR AUSTRALIA, I LOVE YOU BUT ...’ BY CANDY BOWERS

- ◆ How does Candy Bowers use humour to depict the cost of racism?
- ◆ What does Bowers see as the role of school in establishing racism?
- ◆ How does Bowers use gender to illustrate the cost of racism?
- ◆ What is the purpose of the allusions that Bowers makes to musical acts and poets?
- ◆ What role does the structure of the poem play in developing its meaning?

‘THE ELEVENTH HOUSE’ BY SAM DRUMMOND

- ◆ Why does Sam Drummond open the story with the story of the ‘limp figure’?
- ◆ What was the implication of well wishes that were ‘sympathetic but ultimately pointless’?

- ◆ How does Drummond's perception change over time?
- ◆ Why does Drummond feel that disadvantage 'continues and compounds for years and generations'?
- ◆ In what ways does Drummond believe that 'human memory is a remarkable thing'?

'FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH' BY TARA JUNE WINCH

- ◆ What are the implications of Tara June Winch's family coming from 'a long time ago'?
- ◆ How does Winch characterise the experience of childhood?
- ◆ Why does Winch focus on 'bent hopes'?
- ◆ What is Winch's interest in the intersection between class and race?
- ◆ What 'lurks growing up'?

Section C

After reading

1. THEMES

A. The impacts of prejudice

Growing Up in Australia reflects the way that prejudice shapes the experience of young people, for better or (more often) for worse.

i. Institutional prejudice

- ◆ The writers reflect on the ways that prejudice can be embedded in the institutions that shape childhood, from schools to churches and even the family.
- ◆ Many in the collection seek to speak out against the institutions that oppress them, but find themselves thwarted by those in power, or dismissed because of their age and lack of experience.
- ◆ These institutional embodiments of prejudice change and evolve throughout the lives of the writers, although sometimes the damage done in childhood can be difficult to overcome.

ii. Interpersonal prejudice

- ◆ These corrosive attitudes are reflected in the behaviour of the writers' friends, families and peers. At times, the writers themselves embody the very attitudes that have negatively impacted their own lives, giving us a clear understanding of the toll of prejudice.
- ◆ Many writers in the collection operate at the intersections of oppressions on the basis of race, class, sexuality, gender or religion. These nuances lead to great difficulties for some. Where they may find common ground

with their family over the experience of racism, they may also find conflict over sexuality or gender identity. The same is true for many of these intersections, leading writers to make difficult decisions about how they navigate the relationships in their lives.

B. The gaps between generations

- ◆ As social and cultural norms ebb and flow, the experience of successive generations is sometimes so different as to be almost unrecognisable.
- ◆ Barriers of language, class and religion may stand between generations, making it difficult for family members to see their commonalities.
- ◆ These gaps are also ever-changing, with writers often coming to a deeper and more complex understanding of their elders as they move beyond the heightened experiences of adolescence.

C. Identity and belonging

- ◆ This collection documents the push and pull of adolescence, where many of the writers struggle to navigate seemingly competing impulses. On the one hand writers want desperately to belong, with their family, their town, their friends. On the other, they want nothing more than to throw off the shackles imposed by belonging to these norms, norms that they often feel ask them to sacrifice the complexities of their identities.
- ◆ Writing from the perspective of adulthood, many writers approach this dynamic relationship with additional nuance, understanding that it is the interplay between these impulses that created the conditions for them to grow and change.

2. EXTENDED ANALYTICAL RESPONSES

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

- ◆ ‘*Growing Up in Australia* shows that there is no one way to grow up in Australia.’ Discuss.
- ◆ ‘*Growing Up in Australia* demonstrates that social norms serve only to suffocate.’ Do you agree?
- ◆ ‘*Growing Up in Australia* showcases the experience of being othered.’ Do you agree?
- ◆ ‘*Growing Up in Australia* shows the damage caused by the Australian Dream.’ Discuss.
- ◆ To what extent are the parents in *Growing Up in Australia* forced to sacrifice for their children?
- ◆ ‘*Growing Up in Australia* demonstrates the importance of controlling your own identity.’ Discuss.
- ◆ To what extent are the young people in *Growing Up in Australia* destined to be in conflict with adults?
- ◆ ‘*Growing Up in Australia* spotlights the impossibility of moving past your childhood experiences.’ Do you agree?

- ◆ To what extent does a strong sense of community restrict the growth of an individual in *Growing Up in Australia*?
- ◆ To what extent are the writers in *Growing Up in Australia* still growing up?
- ◆ How do experiences of oppression shape the writers in *Growing Up in Australia*?