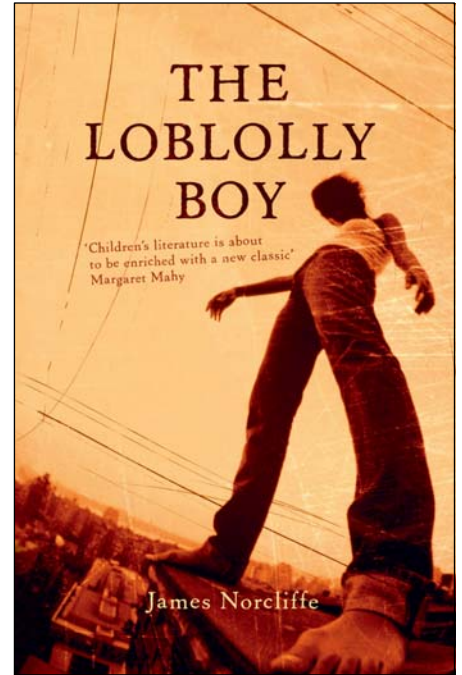


Loblolly Boy

James Norcliffe

September 2009 ISBN 978 1 74237 116 0 pb



Summary

...when he turned around I could see the spread of the feathery green wings that sprouted from his shoulders, beautiful waving wings. I felt as if I were suddenly on a different planet. Part of me wanted to drop to my knees. 'Who are you?' I gasped.

The loblolly boy has the gift of flight. He is invisible to most people apart from the Sensitives, he is much coveted by the sinister Collectors, and he has the power to Exchange – to swap identities with others. But the children who choose to Exchange – often to escape their miserable lives – soon realise that to become one of these magical, Peter Pan-like creatures with its powers of flight and invisibility brings complications and dangers that they never anticipated.

Poignant and gripping, this is an exciting and atmospheric story of mystery, fantasy, adventure and the true nature of what it means to be human.

Author style and motivation

James Norcliffe writes in a distinctive style, reminiscent of the classics of children's literature. There is a timelessness to the narrative and the story is peopled with very real and memorable characters.

"To be able to fly... to become invisible...Is there anybody who hasn't dreamed of having powers like these? I guess the story of *The Loblolly Boy* came from my fooling about with these ideas.

"And invisibility ... Wouldn't that something? Invisibility would be the ultimate hiding place, but far better than any hiding in a cupboard or squeezing under a bed - as you could be both present and concealed at the same time. This would offer delicious opportunities, especially for mischief. I regret to say, I was very fond of mischief.

"The original story I came up with is actually what came to be the first chapter of *The Loblolly Boy*, the one following the prologue. Of course, I was fascinated by what would happen to the newly-minted loblolly boy, but what intrigued me almost as much was why, given the wonders of flying and invisibility, would anyone want to give them up? In this way the idea of the frying pan and the fire developed – or, in other words, the idea that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is." — *James Norcliffe*

Sample discussion questions and activities overleaf.

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In the classroom...

The Loblolly Boy

by James Norcliffe

Discussion & Activity Questions

Themes include: fantasy, friendship, adventure, mystery, what it means to be human

1. Before reading the novel, study the cover and title and predict what the story might be about. Compare and contrast with others in the class. Then read the back cover blurb. Do students' predictions change or remain the same?
2. After reading the book research the meaning of the term 'Loblolly Boy' using www.wikipedia.org. Why do you think the author gave his book this title?
3. Who is the narrator in the prologue and the envoi? What and how do these two sections add to the story of the loblolly boy? To help: think what the novel would be like without these sections.
4. Reread the episode when Michael and the loblolly boy first meet (p 10-12). Rewrite the meeting from the loblolly boy's point of view.
5. Jason and Veronica are changed into seals because they stole the telescope. Michael is shocked by this but Captain Bass says coldly 'These things happen ... [now] you've seen what can happen if you bite off more than you can chew!' (p 49). Do you think the punishment fits the crime? Discuss.
6. The sounds and smells of Captain Bass's lunch are vividly described (p 50). Write about your favourite meal, making it as descriptive as possible. What does it look, smell, sound, taste like?
7. Re-read the passages in which we first meet the Collector (p 66, 98-101). How do the author's descriptions of the Collector's appearance, words and actions tell us that he is a menacing character and a threat to the loblolly boy? What motivates the Collector? Do you know any people who are governed by the same motivations?
8. Draw a picture of one of the novel's characters based on their physical descriptions. For example, the loblolly boy (p 10, 14), Mastiff (p 17), Captain Bass (p 35-37), the collector (p 66).
9. Make a list of the reasons why it is better to be human than a loblolly boy. Then make a list of the reasons why being a loblolly boy is better. Pretend you have to convince someone to either become a loblolly boy or remain human. Produce a piece of creative writing persuading them of your point of view.

Curriculum recommendation and discussion questions prepared by Kate Justelius-Wright, Allen & Unwin.