

BEAR

READING NOTES



BEAR

KIRI LIGHTFOOT

The powerful, humorous yet sensitive story of Jasper, a talented young artist, who learns to face his anger. **Winner of 2024 Storylines Tessa Duder YA Award.**

Recommended for: Ages 13-16

Themes: Anger, violence, anxiety, death, grief, art, self-esteem, step-parenting, school, puberty

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SYNOPSIS

Jasper Robinson-Woods is not okay — his name is too long, his mum has an annoying boyfriend, he never sees his dad, and he can't sleep because of a terrifying nightmare. Oh, and to top it off, his goldfish is dying.

Jasper is overwhelmed with bad thoughts. Are they a sign of disaster to come? The only place he feels safe is in the tree in his front yard.

But then the unimaginable happens: his nightmare comes to life and everything spirals out of control. Jasper decides it's finally time to face his nightmare.

Bear is a moving, often laugh-out-loud funny story showing that even when you hit rock bottom, you never know what, or who, is around the corner.

'Wonderfully fresh and engaging.'

Tessa Duder

'Tender and wickedly humorous - such an important story.'

Karen Foxlee, bestselling author of *Lenny's Book of Everything*

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

My initial ambition with Bear was to write a book about a character who starts with a very negative mindset but whose life feels hugely different by the end. I've always wanted to write a book that explores the complex feelings of being a young adult while balancing these with humour, hope and lightness.

A significant part of my childhood involved accepting and adapting to changes in my family, and this theme often appears in the characters I write. As I delved deeper into Jasper's world, his anger about his family circumstances began to emerge. That became my focus: What is anger? What does it look like, and how does it feel? And what lies underneath it? This is where the Bear nightmare came from.

I wrote in the first-person narrative because I wanted the reader to have insight into Jasper's thoughts — the good, the bad, and the ugly. This book is about Jasper's relationships with those around him — his parents, teachers, Nina, Steve, and Elise. However, the most important relationship I wanted to explore was Jasper's relationship with himself — how he talks to himself and deals with the 'noise' of his fears and worries. How does Jasper learn to let go of the unhelpful, catastrophic thoughts and focus on the positive, helpful ones? He can't change them, but he can change the power they have over him.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. What do you think are the main themes of this book?
2. Why does Jasper hide in trees?
3. What does the bear represent for Jasper, and how does the author use the bear to explore Jasper's thoughts and emotions?
4. What does Jasper learn about his family throughout the book?
5. What does Jasper learn about himself?
6. Discuss Jasper's relationship with his father. Is his father important to him? Why does he struggle with this relationship?
7. Asking for help is a theme in this book. Who are the people who help Jasper?
8. Jasper has a dark sense of humour. How is humour used to illustrate parts of his personality?
9. What are the significant turning points in the book?
10. In what ways is Jasper different at the end of the book?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kiri Lightfoot is an NZ-based author and actor. She has worked as a scriptwriter in children's television and as an actor both for theatre and screen. She continues to work part-time in television and also runs poetry reading sessions in aged-care homes and hospitals with charity 'Active Arts'.

Kiri worked for many years as a telephone counsellor with Youthline and as a volunteer mentor in an alternative education school. *Bear* is her first novel for young adults and was inspired by working with young people at this time. Kiri is now a mother of three school-aged children and lives in central Auckland.

Her previous books are picture books: *Ming's Iceberg*, illustrated by Kimberly Andrews (Scholastic 2021) and *Every Second Friday*, illustrated by Ben Galbraith (Hodder Children's Books 2008), a shortlist in the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards 2009.