

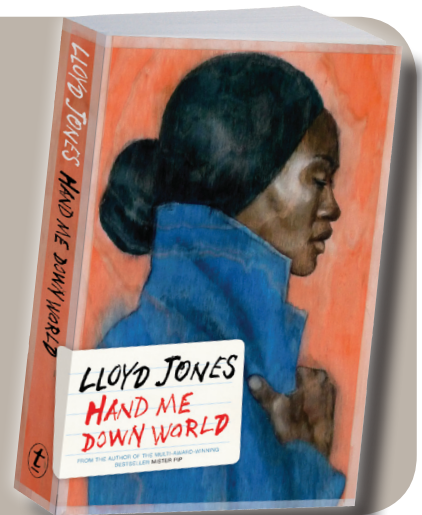
# Hand Me Down World

Lloyd Jones

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Fiction, Trade Paperback



## About Lloyd Jones

Lloyd Jones was born in New Zealand in 1955. His best known works include *Mister Pip*, winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, *The Book of Fame*, winner of numerous literary awards, *Biografi*, *Choo Woo*, *Here at the End of the World We Learn to Dance*, *Paint Your Wife* and the short story collection *The Man in the Shed*. He lives in Wellington.

## A reader's introduction to *Hand Me Down World*

Lloyd Jones is the consummate storyteller and this tale of a woman tricked into giving up her child is Jones' finest. Told through multiple voices, the story of Ines' ordeal unfolds as each character contributes his or her version of a part of the story. The jigsaw pieces of the multiple narrative culminate in a clear picture of a desperate mother who is prepared to sacrifice her security, her honour and her freedom, but never her dignity, in order to connect with her stolen child. It is a tale of suffering, a mother's love and of humanity but it is also a comment on humanity and our treatment of our fellow humans.

## Questions for discussion

1. Ines steals, lies, manipulates others and even prostitutes herself for the sake of her weekly visits with her son. Does Jones condemn this behaviour or simply present it for reader judgement? If we see Ines as a devoted mother who turns her life upside down for the chance to be reunited with her child, can we then condemn her? Can the love of a mother for her child transcend morality?
2. Jermayne is a smarmy opportunist, yet Ines is honest about her feelings for him when she refers to the 'strangely complex feeling I have for Jermayne'. (p.209)  
How do you understand this man and how do you explain Ines' response to him?

3. While this is Ines' story, Jones allows the stories of others to be heard, a device which serves to extend the narrative so that it progresses sideways as well as forwards. To what extent is this then also Ralf's story? Jermayne's story? Or the story of Defoe?
4. There are many strangers who take Ines into their homes and into their lives. Look at the Frenchman, the original Ines, the police inspector, etc. Do you find the actions of these people believable or do they serve as a device to advance the plot? Other characters take hideous advantage of Ines' vulnerability. What is Jones saying about the nature of human beings?
5. Ines regularly takes Ralf to the zoo to observe the animals and she describes their caged movements to him in detail. When in custody, Ines sees herself as the caged animal. 'I am a small animal in its pen...I am captured, caged.' Later, Ines says 'I sat unnoticed whereas the dog drew glances and smiles.' (p.264)  
What is Jones saying about our treatment of others?

Ralf is obsessed by the photo of the bodies writhing in the pit. What is the role of this element of the story in reflecting on how humans treat each other?

6. Abebi imagines a future when Ines will leave prison. Abebi and Daniel will meet her as do the families of other inmates released on that day. But Abebi is unable to imagine the next part of this encounter. She simply says, 'I'm getting there. I'm just not there yet.'  
What do you believe will be the final episode of this tale?

## Construction of the narrative is integral to the telling of this story:

7. What does the usage of multiple narrators contribute to the story?
8. How does the retrospective nature of the narrative work to build, alter and then mould our response to the characters?



9. Why is Ines' voice heard only in part 4? How does this device affect our reading of the book?
10. Given that this book is essentially a collection of testimonies, how does the device of confession contribute to the story? How does the structure of the book affect our understanding of 'truth'?
11. How are we to understand the title, *Hand Me Down World*? Is it that Ines is handed on to others as she engages with her quest to find, meet and connect with her son? Is Jones making a statement about the world we hand on to others or the truth we hand on? Is there another interpretation?