



# BIRD

## CRYSTAL CHAN

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Fiction, B paperback

**RECOMMENDED AGE:**  
YEARS 7-9



### Text's Teaching Notes for the Australian Curriculum

- ▶ Text's teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ Students can record their responses in writing through reading journals, online discussions or verbally in classroom discussions.

<b>Strands</b>	LA – Language LT – Literature LY – Literacy
<b>Modes</b>	W – Writing L – Listening R – Reading
<b>General capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Literacy</li> <li> Ethical behaviour</li> <li> Intercultural understanding</li> <li> Personal and social capability</li> <li> Critical and creative thinking</li> <li> Numeracy</li> <li> Information and communication technology</li> </ul>
<b>Cross-curriculum priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Sustainability</li> <li> Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia</li> <li> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</li> </ul>

### SYNOPSIS

*Bird* is a story about family, identity and grief. Jewel is constantly reminded of her connection to a brother she never knew, a brother who died the day she was born. Jewel feels out of place. Of mixed heritage and an only child, she feels caught between the superstitions of her father, the apparent uncaring practicality of her mother and the unexplained silence of her grandfather. When she meets an outsider, John, who one day appears in her favourite tree, she is excited by the prospect of a new friendship. They connect through their interest in the natural world in particular stars and geology. But there is something about John that does not make sense. Why does her grandfather spit and hit him? Why are there so many unanswered questions about this boy? Jewel wants to find her own place in the world, but first she must confront the truth about the past. *Bird* is a moving story about identity, forgiveness and faith.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Wisconsin to a father from Hong Kong and a Polish American mother, Crystal Chan understands what it means to search for a place to belong. From her childhood in the cornfields of middle America, Chan turned to writing to find her identity and honed her skills through writing for magazines, public speaking and telling stories. It is her skill as a storyteller that is at the heart of her first novel, *Bird*.



**BEFORE READING**

1. Recount a family story you have been told or heard of that has shaped the person you are today and explain its impact. **W LT (ACELT1644)**
2. What superstitions are there in your family? Do some research (you could interview people you know) about superstitions and beliefs from different cultures? Where do they come from and why do you think people believe them? **W S L LT (ACELT1633)**
3. What does it mean to be of mixed heritage? How would you describe your background? How important is it to your identity? How might this be different if you are adopted? **W LT (ACELT1633)**

**WHILE READING**

1. After reading the first paragraph, what questions do you have about the novel? Write them down and return to them when you finish reading. How and when does Chan answer your questions? In what way does this help to build the story? **R LT (ACELT1771)**
2. For each chapter, note the following on the table below: **R LT (ACELT1637)**

Chapter	Key moment in the chapter	Examples of language devices such as metaphors, similes...	Recurring motifs / symbols
e.g. chapter 1			

3. What is the importance of names in the novel? **R, LT (ACELT1767)**
4. In Chapter 4, consider how the warmth of the meal is contrasted with the atmosphere in the room. What is the effect of this? **R LT (ACELT1767)**
5. Jewel complains that no one understands the importance of her rock circle. Why do you think it is so important to her? **R LT (ACELT1622)**
6. Is it possible for Jewel to separate herself from her brother's memory? Explain your answer. **R, LT (ACELT1622)**
7. What surprises Jewel and her mother when they visit the church minister? Why do you think the minister offers the answer he does? **R LT (ACELT1622)**
8. In Chapter 5, Eugene describes an Event Horizon. What are the 'event horizons' in the novel? **R LA (ACELA1770)**
9. What indications are there in the novel that Jewel is lonely? **R LT (ACELT1621)**
10. Why do you think Jewel and John are so interested in the planets and stars? **R LT (ACELT1767)**

11. Track the way that relationships change throughout the novel. What causes the changes and are they repairable? **R LT (ACELT1806)**
12. What superstitions are referred to in the novel and how do they influence the actions of the characters? **R LT (ACELT1637)**
13. Consider the symbolism of Eugene's tree – Event Horizon. How might its name reflect their lives? **R LT (ACELT1767)**

**AFTER READING**

**Character**

1. Jewel and Eugene/John are drawn together because of their similarities. What do they have in common? In what way are they also different? **R LT (ACELT1633)**
2. Each character is experiencing a different sense of loss and grief. Explore what this means for each of them and how they overcome it. **R LY (ACELY1754)**
3. Which characters do you empathise with and which are you critical of? Sort the characters into groups and consider why you feel that way about them. Compare your grouping with someone else. Be prepared to justify your answers with evidence from the novel. **R S L LY (ACELY1754)**
4. Eugene says "I want to find out what's out there." What do you think he is looking for? **R LY (ACELY1754)**
5. Jewel and both of her parents all have very different expectations for Jewel's behaviour and future. Argue the case for each (Father, mother and Jewel), considering why one or other perspective might be the better. You could do this as a written task, an oral task or even a class debate. Make sure that you have a clear statement of contention (main idea) for each. **R LT LY (ACELT1771) (ACELY1744)**

**Style and Structure**

1. How does Chan use voice to depict the characters and events in the novel? Consider the characteristics of voice in *Bird*. Make a list of words that you associate with each character. What does the list suggest about the character? Explore how each character is different because of the words they use. You could recreate a conversation between two characters to using their distinct voice or write a short monologue from a character's point of view and see if your friends can guess which character you are. **R LA (ACELA1553)**
2. While Grandpa does not speak throughout most of the novel, how does Chan help the reader to understand what he is 'saying'? For example, consider the non-verbal communication that occurs? Make a list of quotes that indicate non-verbal communication. Consider the ways that you



might communication with people you know that do not require you to speak. Try a few out with a friend and see how much you can tell them without words (this shouldn't include writing message down). **R LT** (ACELT1767)

## Themes

### Truth

1. Why does Eugene tell so many lies? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
2. Sometimes the truth is difficult to face. Consider the way that the truth is ignored in the novel and the consequences of doing so. **R LY** (ACELY1744)
3. Is it always the best to tell the truth? Find evidence in the novel to support your answer. **R LY** (ACELY1746)
4. "And since people don't listen to what you want to say," I said slowly, "why bother telling them the truth?" Are lies ever justified? Support your response using events in the novel. **R LT** (ACELT1771)

### Grief

1. In what way does grief influence the characters' actions? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
2. Grief can still exist, even if no one has died. What are the different types of grief in the novel? **R LY** (ACELY1744)
3. Consider the words that are used in the novel that you could link to grief. Make a list and then add some of your own. **R LY** (ACELY1733)
4. Jewel asks her grandfather why he is so sad, but Eugene wants to know why he is angry. Are the two related? What do they tell you about grief? **R LT** (ACELT1771)

### Forgiveness

1. What role does forgiveness play in Grandpa's silence? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
2. What do the characters in the novel need forgiveness for and how do they seek it? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
3. It is more difficult to accept forgiveness than to give it. Is this the case in *Bird*? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
4. How do Jewel and Grandpa demonstrate their forgiveness? **R LT** (ACELT1635)

### Relationships

1. What does friendship offer to Jewel that she didn't have before? **R LT** (ACELT1771)
2. What does the novel suggest are the important aspects of friendship? Find evidence of these qualities in the novel. **R LT** (ACELT1635)
3. When Jewel's mother declares that she didn't want Jewel the day she was born, Jewel believes that she

was an unwanted child. Is this really what her mother meant? **R LT** (ACELT1635)

4. In what way does Jewel feel responsible for holding her parents' relationship together? **R LT** (ACELT1635)

### Place and Belonging

1. What suggestions are there that Jewel's father has strong connections to his heritage? Is this always positive? **R LT** (ACELT1633)
2. Jewel refers to granite as irregular rocks. To what extent are the rocks a metaphor for characters in the novel? **R LT** (ACELT1637)
3. Make list of significant physical places in the novel and explore their role in the novel. How do the characters relate to their places differently and how are the places depicted by the author? **R LT** (ACELT1806)

## RESPONDING

1. Imagine you are the grandfather, who does not speak. Write an internal monologue that expresses his perspective on an event in the novel. **R W LT** (ACELT1632)
2. It is not important whether what you believe in is real or not, what is important is that you believe. Is this true in *Bird*? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
3. In our own grief, we sometimes forget to consider others. Is this true of the characters in Crystal Chan's *Bird*? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
4. You're a counsellor invited to work with the family to help them deal with Bird's death and the subsequent issues. Identify each character's concerns and offer your solution. You could present this as a written or oral report. **R W LT** (ACELT1632)
5. Whether you believe in them or not, superstitions are harmless. In light of the novel, do you agree? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
6. In their attempt to protect her, Jewel's parents place her in greater danger. Do you agree? **R LT** (ACELT1771)
7. Jewel and Grandpa decide to create a new recording. What would they record?
8. Pair up with a friend and create their recording complete with music and dialogue. **R W LT** (ACELT1632)
9. "...something inside her would wither away..." What is it that causes each character with 'wither' in the novel? **R LT** (ACELT1771)
10. It's more important to know who you are than what you are. Consider how this is evident in the novel *Bird*. **R LT** (ACELT1635)