

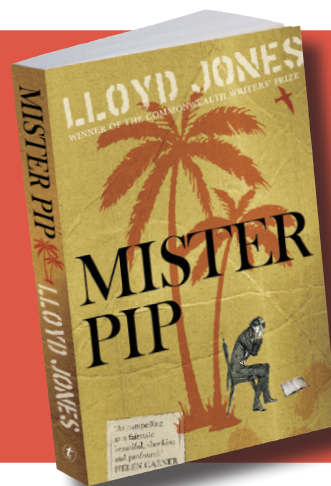
## Mister Pip

Lloyd Jones

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Fiction paperback



### Praise for *Mister Pip*

'*Mister Pip* is a rare, original and truly beautiful novel. It reminds us that every act of reading and telling is a transformation, and that stories, even painful ones, may carry possibilities of redemption. An unforgettable novel, moving and deeply compelling...' Gail Jones

'As compelling as a fairytale—beautiful, shocking and profound.' Helen Garner

### About Lloyd Jones

Lloyd Jones was born in New Zealand in 1955. *Mister Pip* won the 2007 Commonwealth Writers' Prize and was shortlisted for the 2007 Booker Prize. His other works include *The Book of Fame*, winner of numerous literary awards, *Biografi*, *Choo Woo*, *Here at the End of the World We Learn to Dance* and *Paint Your Wife*. He lives in Wellington.

### A reader's introduction to *Mister Pip*

Following Papua New Guinea's blockade of the beautiful, but copper mine dependant, island of Bougainville in 1990, war begins between the PNG 'redskins' and young local 'Rambos'. The village in which *Mister Pip* is set has been left to fend for itself. There is fish and fruit in abundance but no medicine, doctors or teachers. The villagers wait stoically and bravely for the inevitable.

Told through the eyes of young native girl, Matilda, *Mister Pip* is a stunning portrayal of an island at the mercy of outside forces. With all western contact withdrawn, the one remaining white man, Mr Watts, re-opens the school to restore hope to the villagers. Unqualified and armed with only a copy of *Great Expectations*, he begins to narrate the story of Pip to the children, offering them a world far removed but a narrative very similar to their own. Through daily installments, Pip becomes a real friend to Matilda, more real than the father who has abandoned her. She marks her friendship by drawing his name in the sand.

Having given the children hope, Mr Watts draws in the adults of the village to share their wisdom and another perspective on the world with their stories of seeds and fish and colour; however, he faces silent hostility

from Matilda's mother, Dolores, who feels her faith threatened by Mr Watts.

The glimmer of normality provided by the daily schooling is broken when the 'redskins' arrive demanding to know where every villager is. When the villagers are unable to account for the mysterious Pip, drawn into the sand. They are given an ultimatum.

In such a world there can be no fairytale ending. As the terribly sick and exhausted soldiers return, Mr Watts declares himself to be Mister Pip and his subsequent death, along with that of his former adversary, Dolores, is an atrocity.

Matilda flees the violence and is saved from a raging river, taken to the Solomons and from there to Townsville, where her father lives. Her later research leads her to New Zealand and England, to the home of Pip and her Mr Watts and to the realisation that her voice is special and unique and that it could take her home to tell her story.

### Questions for discussion

1. What does Matilda mean when she says, 'Literature doesn't just offer escape, it can take you home'? In what way does it take her home?
2. Mr Watts was 'whatever we needed him to be, what we asked him to be. Perhaps there are lives like that—they pour into whatever space we have made ready for them to fill.' To what degree does Mr Watts fill the spaces made for him by the crisis in Bougainville?
3. What makes *Mister Pip* a truly universal story—a story of the human condition in general? Or does the book presume too much to expect the island children to relate to a story set in nineteenth century England?
4. Stories have a job to do. They have to teach you something. What does Matilda learn from the narration of *Great Expectations*?

5. 'White men were to blame for the mine and the blockade. A white man had given us the name of our island. White men had given me my name. By now it was also clear that white men had forgotten us.' Discuss how the see-sawing attentions of white men affects the island, from the mine owners to Mr Watts' teachings.
6. Dicken's *Great Expectations* plays an important part in the narrative of *Mister Pip*. What other examples are there of books featuring within books and how successful have these been?
7. Discuss the straightforward prose style Jones uses to describe the graphic violence towards the end of the novel. Does the prose affect the gravity of these acts?