

All the Green Year

Don Charlwood

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Fiction, B paperback

Recommended for Secondary School

Resource Kit Contains

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SYNOPSIS

The year I remember best from those days is 1929. This was the year I turned fourteen and went into the eighth grade; the year too that Grandfather McDonald became peculiar and we moved to live with him in his house on the cliffs.

For Charlie Reeve, 1929 is a year of change. He struggles to deal with the realities of growing up, as he is no longer able to dream away the days in his small, coastal Victorian town. During a crucial year of school Charlie lives in fear of his father and his teacher. To make matters worse, his neighbour Squid keeps getting him in to trouble. Charlie's best friend Johnno is busy seeing a girl, which leads to a terrible fight with Big Simmons. After this year things will never be the same again.

Don Charlwood uniquely captures a boy on the edge of manhood—and the wonders, pain and infatuations of adolescence. This novel shows what life was like in Australian between World War I and the Depression. *All the Green Year* was first published in 1965 and was subsequently made into a popular ABC television series. Students will enjoy the humour and authenticity of this novel as the themes are still relevant to today's young adults.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Charlwood was born in Melbourne in 1915 and grew up in Frankston. He joined the RAAF in 1940, and his wartime experience and subsequent career in air-traffic control took him throughout Australia, and to New Guinea, the United Kingdom and Canada. Among Don's many books are his acclaimed debut, *No Moon Tonight* (1956), an account of his time with Bomber Command and a two-volume autobiography. Don was

made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to literature in 1992. He died in 2012 at the age of 96 and is survived by his wife of 68 years, four children and five grandchildren.

THEMES

All the Green Year is a coming-of-age novel that beautifully observes Australian childhood and the seeming invincibility of youth.

Growing up—boyhood vs. manhood

Throughout the novel Charlie is caught between the carelessness of youth and the responsibilities of becoming an adult. His father and teacher are constantly breathing down his neck to meet their high expectations, which places a lot of pressure on Charlie and his future. Over the course of the novel Charlie begins to leave his childhood ways behind as he tackles the responsibilities of growing up.

Invincibility

Charlie, Johnno and Squid continually find themselves in risky situations—a camel ride, bull-fighting, physical conflicts, getting lost in the bush and running away. The belief of invincibility is a trait often held by male youths. Readers are given insight into how easily teenagers can find themselves in a potentially dangerous situation and how peer pressure can have an impact on the decisions they make.

Bullying

Bullying is a dominant theme in the novel. Charlie is bullied by his father, and the boys are all bullied by their teacher Mr Moloney. Johnno's father condones physical punishment at school and physically abuses his son when he gets out of line. This novel shows young boys

living in fear of authority figures in an era very different to the strict laws of today.

Family

Charlie is the only main character to have a full family unit. The importance of family responsibility and sticking together is shown when Charlie's family move into Grandfather McDonald's house. Each member of the family is responsible for taking care of him as his health deteriorates. The author shows contrasting family structures to Charlie's as Eileen takes on the maternal role for her brother Johnno in the absence of their mother, and through Squid's lack of supervision from his widowed mother leading a 'flapper' lifestyle.

Mateship

Charlie and Johnno's friendship is central to the narrative. Both boys are linked by similar circumstances and common interests, and continually back each other up. Their friendship is tested when a girl becomes involved, which is a situation that readers will be able to relate to. Charlie shows just how far he will go for friendship when he takes Johnno out to sea, and he ultimately realises how empty his life becomes without his best friend.

Freedom

The need for freedom is a recurring theme in the novel and is a concept that all young readers will understand. Charlie prefers the freedom of swimming and exploring with his friends to the responsibilities of studying for his Merit. Johnno's freedom becomes limited when he takes up a part-time job. Johnno and Charlie plan to run away early in the novel; however, they soon realise the harsh realities of independence and that their freedom is not as liberating as they had hoped.

STYLE

All the Green Year is narrated by the fourteen-year-old protagonist Charlie Reeve, providing an appropriate point of view for young adults. His voice is honest and insightful as he recalls the memorable moments of 1929. He makes perceptive observations about the people in his life and the impact that events have had on his development. The first chapter foreshadows a fiasco that occurs at the end of the year, which the reader is guided towards through Charlie's commentary.

LANGUAGE

There are many cultural references and slang terms from the 1920s that may require students to do some further research, for example:

- Celebrities—Don Juan, Billy Grimes, Rudolph Valentino, Norma Taldmadge
- Literature—*David Copperfield*, 'Ulysses', 'Wild Colonial Boy'
- Concepts—Darwinism, Tolstoyan, Bolsheviks

- Objects—dripping sandwich, chip heater, gramophone

The dialogue, especially that of Grandfather McDonald and Squid, uses older and regional styles of English ('ye bluidy fool', 'nothink', 'about' etc.). Discuss the abbreviated style of language and different spelling of words used in the early 1900s and how it has changed over time.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- Discuss the meanings associated with the word 'green' and how it is used in the title. For example, green can be related to the Old English verb *growan* (to grow) and can therefore symbolise hope and growth.
- Becoming a man is a principal theme in the novel. Ask students to describe the attributes of a man: how they dress, how they behave and at what age they think a boy becomes a man.

READING QUESTIONS

1. Charlie is lucky enough to have both of his parents; however, he does not understand why anyone would want to have a family if all you do is worry about them. What does it mean to be part of a family, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of having a family?
2. What do cars symbolise in this novel? What are the drawbacks of not having a car and how does it affect Charlie's life?
3. What impact does having an ill family member have on Charlie and his family?
4. Is the idea of 'protecting a woman's honour' in chapter 7 still in fashion? Explain.
5. In chapter 9 and 10 both Johnno and Squid are named as heroes. Describe the qualities and expectations for a hero, and decide which character is more fitting of the hero title and why.
6. What do you imagine Aunt Ruby was trying to get her father-in-law to sign before Charlie interrupted? Describe the circumstances of single women during this era in your response.
7. Why would Charlie think it an advantage to have lost a father in the war?
8. What do you think Charlie means in chapter 17 when he wants to show how girls should be managed? Where would he get his ideas about women from?
9. Charlie's father has a history of bullying his son in the novel. Why do you think he reacts sympathetically to Charlie after the fight with Big Simmons?
10. What do you think the death of Gyp symbolises?

READING ACTIVITIES

Slang

During 1928 I had worn apple catchers, but my main Christmas present had been a pair of long 'uns. (2)

Australian language during the 1920s consisted of a lot of slang. What are apple catchers and long 'uns?

Post-war Period

Old man Johnston was a shortish ex chief petty officer with a prominent blue-polished chin and eyes like agates. (2)

1929 is 14 years after World War I, so it is only fitting that the fathers in the novel would have served in this war. Explain the presence of the Great War in this novel by using references from the text and describe how the war has affected any characters directly or indirectly. What type of post-war attitude exists in the text?

Corporal Punishment

About a year after that, Moloney, in a temper, had hit Johnno across the face with the strap. (3)

What is your opinion of old man Johnston's reaction to tell Moloney to give his son further punishment for not taking it like a man? Considering corporal punishment was not banned in Australian schools until the mid-90s, how is this reflective of the culture of men at the time? Do you think Mr Johnston would have had the same reaction if it was his daughter being punished?

Immigration

My father always referred to England as "Home"; in fact England was "Home" to most of our friends. (7)

Immigration in Australia flourished both before and after World War I. Explain the representation of immigration to Australia in this novel by referring to the heritages and roots of particular characters. Does the novel provide a realistic view of Australia at the time?

Video Killed the Radio Star

On the whole my father disapproved of the pictures. He claimed that they had put an end to things like the local brass band and the family songs around the piano... (91)

Charlie's father believes the pictures have a negative impact on family time and replace traditional activities. Can you make a comparison to a type of modern technology that has replaced another in your life and provide some family activities from your childhood or your parents that are no longer in fashion?

Hypochondriac

"Trouble is lockjaw. Didn't know one tell you?"

"No," I muttered.

"Starts in y' face. Y' teeth jam shut; after a bit y' head bends back til y' end up practically in a circle." (127)

Squid commonly suffers from different ailments throughout the novel and regularly worries about the

onset of sickness. What is your understanding of a hypochondriac and do you think Squid is one? Find examples in the text to back up your opinion. How do you think Squid's single mother affects his health and his attitude to his health?

Freedom

But in some way the tree meant a good deal to us. For years it had been a place of escape, and perhaps we knew even then that we would always associate it with our periods of freedom. (204)

Explain how the sea is also a symbol of freedom for the boys by using examples from the text in your response.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

- Write a short scene of dialogue that could have taken place between Eileen and the oarsman from when they go for a drive in the Riley and return to the dance.
- Rewrite the camel scene from chapter 10 from Squid's point of view.
- Write a note that Johnno could have left to his sister or to Charlie before he takes off.

HISTORY ACTIVITIES

- The depiction of the role of women during the 1920s is limited in this novel. Research the changing role of women during this period and write a short essay.
- Research past and present corporal punishment laws in Australian Schools. Create a debate showing arguments for and against its use as a discipline tool and the ambiguous laws regarding the topic. Try to be specific to your state if possible.
- Research the title of Grandfather McDonald's house and decide if the author was inspired by the real Thermopylae.

DRAMA ACTIVITIES

- Using the research you have done about the 1920s, choose an important theme from the time (post-war, depression, flappers etc.) and write a 3-minute script between two characters that discusses this theme. Dress your characters in clothing that is suitable to the time period and perform.
- The movie that the boys watch in the novel would have been a silent film. Create your own silent film that uses music (no dialogue). You could use one of the film plots from the novel or make up your own.