

TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

Longacre Press children's fantasy novel

The Strange and Diverting Story of The Loblolly Boy

*A Fantasy Novel by
James Norcliffe
involving Enchantment,
Mystery, one Garden Gnome
and a Wombat's Bottom*

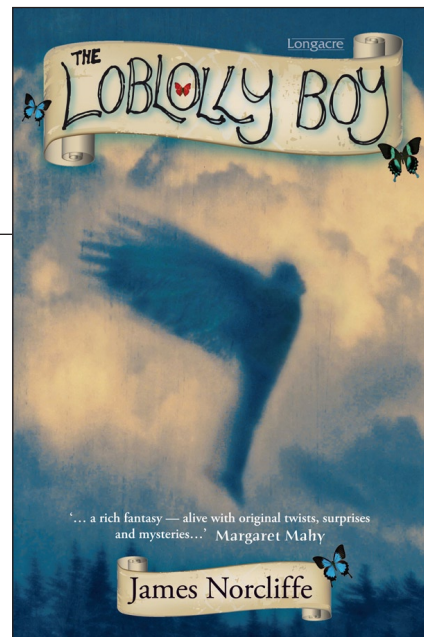
To the boy called Red, it seems the most marvellous escape he could wish for: a gift that grants him more freedom than he ever believed possible – the chance to fly, to soar with the gulls, high over the tall brick walls that have imprisoned him for so long.

But this gift comes with a terrible price – and puts him in grave danger.

Is there anyone Red can trust to help him? The curious Captain Bass who has strange powers of his own? The wildly unpredictable twin sisters he is strongly drawn to?

In this magical, mysterious story, Red's adventure is like a chamber of mirrors at a carnival – a dazzling and breathtaking tale.

'This is a rich fantasy – alive with original twists, surprises and mysteries which I dare not reveal. Children's Literature is about to be enriched with a new classic.' Margaret Mahy



SPECIFICATIONS:

Imprint: Longacre Press
ISBN: 978 1 877460 25 8
Classification: children's fantasy novel
Publication: May 2009
RRP: \$19.99
Format: 198 X 128mm
Extent: 224 pp
Binding: paperback
Readership: 10 years and up

Resource Kit contains:

- Author statement
- Language exercises
- Character analysis, and
- Creative responses and research topics

ISBN: 978 1 877361 91 3 ©Longacre Press

Published by **Longacre Press** PO Box 5340, Dunedin

Tel: 03 477 2911, Fax: 03 477 7222 Email: admin@longacre.co.nz www.longacre.co.nz

Distributed by **Random House New Zealand Ltd**, PB 102950, North Shore Mail Centre, Auckland,

Tel: 09 441 2710, Fax: 09 441 2713 Email: customerservice@randomhouse.co.nz

Author Statement:

Where did *The Loblolly Boy* come from?

To be able to fly ... to become invisible...

Is there anybody who hasn't dreamed of having powers like these?

I guess the story of *The Loblolly Boy* came from my fooling about with these ideas.

As a small boy, I dreamed of flying. I lived on hills and climbed trees and the sky above me was always a bright and inviting immensity. I envied the birds whose element it really was and I longed to wheel and soar with their kind of freedom. I remember once as a small boy sitting in an apple box, intensely willing it to be an aeroplane, and realising at the same time that it could never be one. It was, I think, my first genuine appreciation of the great divide between the real world and the imagined one.

And invisibility... Wouldn't that be something? Invisibility would be the ultimate hiding place: far better than squeezing into a wardrobe or wriggling under a bed – as you could be both present and concealed at the same time. This would offer delicious opportunities, especially for mischief. I regret to say, as a boy I was very fond of mischief.

The original story I came up with is actually what came to be the first chapter of *The Loblolly Boy*, the one following the prologue. In this story I imagined a boy desperately in need of escape and being offered the power of flight by the strange loblolly boy. At first doubtful, the boy is persuaded. All this happens in the gardens of the Big House with its trees, Keepers and dogs. Only when, astonishingly, the boy finds himself able to fly does he discover that he has been tricked: that in accepting the power of flight he has forfeited his being; that he has exchanged existences with the loblolly boy.

This episode I thought was a short story, more or less complete in itself, and an editor I showed it to very much liked the magical qualities and intrigue of the story. She did feel, though, that it read more like the opening chapter of a much longer story and encouraged me to develop the tale.



The idea of enlarging this story really appealed and soon took hold of me completely. It turned out to be great fun to write and the story rattled along so quickly that my time at the computer was more like taking dictation than carefully composing.

Of course, I was fascinated by what would happen to the newly-minted loblolly boy, but what intrigued me almost as much was why, given the wonders of flying and invisibility, anyone would want to give them up. In this way the idea of the frying pan and the fire developed – or, in other words, the idea that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Our language is full of such sayings and warnings: the grass is always greener (not really), beware the poisoned chalice, of Greeks bearing gifts, and on and on.

So I devised the prologue as what Alfred Hitchcock, the great film director, called a *MacGuffin* (a beginning that seems to be the real story but which really only introduces the real story). In this way the reader guesses how the loblolly boy of the opening chapter came to be, but not why he wanted so desperately to become human again. This is left to our loblolly boy to discover. The real story then becomes a quest of sorts in which the loblolly boy finds his original family and with the help of a pair of lively sisters is eventually able to reclaim his identity.

The book was such a pleasure as it unfolded. I love the fusion of scary bits, funny bits and fantasy bits, as all these came together as I traced the loblolly boy's story.

It has delighted me that so many readers of early drafts have found *The Loblolly Boy* just as much fun to read.

James Norcliffe

Before Reading:

1. What does the cover picture indicate that the book is about?
2. When and where might the story be set?
3. What does the title suggest to you?
4. Read the author's dedication (p. 5). If you wrote a book to whom would you dedicate it and what would the dedication say?
5. The author uses personification to help describe inanimate objects. For example, '...the huddling hills.' (p. 65). Write a poem or paragraph about the landscape in your local area using personification.
6. The author often uses animal imagery in the similes. For example, 'I...perched on top like an oversized green pigeon.' (p. 83) and '...ended up on his back like a big black beetle...' (p. 172). Find two more examples of animal imagery in the book. Write a simile using each of the following animals: elephant, weta, puppy, penguin, hippopotamus.

Language:

1. Figurative language is used to convey ideas that might otherwise be difficult to express. Two examples of figurative language are metaphors and similes. Examples of these are, '...it sped round and round like the remorseless second hand on a large, forbidding clock.' (p. 9) and '... I've been working my fingers to the bone...' (p. 9). Find more examples of each type of figurative language from the book.
2. What do you think the genre of this book is? List the aspects that are indicative of this genre.
3. The story is told in the first and third person. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Was it effective? Choose one of the first person passages in the book and rewrite it in third person narrative.
4. The author uses many common sayings or proverbs in the book. (A proverb is a short, popular saying that expresses some widely accepted truth or a useful thought.) What do the following phrases mean?:
 - *A Dog's Life* (p. 7)
 - a fish to water (p. 34)
 - cat got your tongue (p. 43)
 - bite off more than you can chew (p. 55)
 - out of the frying pan into the fire (p. 59)
 - pigs can fly (p. 126)
 - as thick as thieves (p. 171)
7. What figure of speech are the following words examples of: 'swish', (p. 12), 'crash' (p. 23) 'swooping' (p. 29), 'thwacked' (p. 52), 'splashed' (p. 56), 'gasped', and (p. 57) 'squawk' (p. 94)? Find five more similar words from the novel and write a poem or descriptive paragraph which includes these words.
8. 'Gobsmacked' (p. 148) and 'checkmated' (p. 195) are blend or portmanteau words. What does this mean? Who invented the figure of speech 'portmanteau'? Think of some more blend words. Make up some of your own.
9. Find definitions for the following words which are taken from the novel and write one sentence for each:
 - remorseless (p. 9)
 - vindictive (p. 11)
 - derelict (p. 33)
 - cloying (p. 35)
 - morose (p. 38)
 - ominous (p. 48)
 - vile (p. 65)
 - filch (p. 66)
 - opalescent (p. 68)
 - harrowed (p. 75)
 - dissipate (p. 79)
 - contemptuous (p. 84)
 - transfixed (p. 95)
 - burnished (p. 109)
 - surreptitious (p. 111)
 - dexterity (p. 114)
 - deviate (p. 157)
 - subdued (p. 161)
 - myriad (p. 190)

Characters:

1. Who is the narrator in the prologue and the envoi?
2. Think of three adjectives to describe Michael when he is the loblolly boy.
3. Describe Michael's reaction to the following events:
 - Being changed into the loblolly boy.
 - Discovering he is invisible.
 - Seeing his future through the telescope.
 - Finding out Meg and Suzy are his sisters.
 - Leaving Captain Bass for the last time.
4. What is Michael's nickname and where did it come from (p. 15)? Take a poll of nicknames of your classmates and the origins of their nicknames.
5. List the qualities of Suzy's personality and find examples of when she displays each of these qualities.
6. Why is the guard dog called Mastiff (p. 22)?
7. Draw a picture of one of the characters based on their physical descriptions. For example, the loblolly boy (p. 16 & 20), Mastiff (pp. 22–23), Captain Bass (p. 42) or Suzy (pp. 130–131).
8. Write a character portrait of one of the following characters: Michael, Captain Bass, Meg, The Collector and Ms Tasker.
9. How does Suzy's relationship with her Mum change and develop by the end of the novel? What role does the loblolly boy play in this change?
10. Meg says Mum gets angry because of the Irish in the family and her red hair (p. 142). This is a stereotype. Define what stereotype means. What other stereotypes are linked to different nationalities and outward appearances? How can using stereotypes cause problems?

Creative responses and research ideas:

1. There had been a poster of Charlie Chaplin on Ben's bedroom wall (p. 7). Write a biography of this actor including the names and dates of some of the movies that he starred in.
2. Ben lists what had been in his room before the packers arrived (p. 7). Write a list and draw a plan of what is in your own bedroom.
3. Ben calls the shift from this house the 'Great Change' (p. 8). Have you ever experienced a great change in your life? If so, write a paragraph describing it.
4. Ben is playing with the precious Hornby train set that was given to him by his father (p. 8). Do you or your family have any precious heirlooms that have been passed down through the generations?
5. The drive outside the motel is lined with yew trees (p. 12). Find the four other trees that are mentioned in the book. Research these trees, e.g. are they native to New Zealand, what do they look like, are they deciduous, etc. Write an illustrated report of your findings.
6. Draw a picture of the Great House and its surrounds (pp. 14–15).
7. Michael would rather learn to fly than play Four Square (p. 17). Design a pamphlet describing the rules of Four Square or another of your favourite school playground games.
8. Michael makes the gesture of slitting his own throat to the loblolly boy (p. 18). What does this gesture mean? Think of five other gestures and their meanings. Research one or two gestures from cultures other than your own. What do they mean?
9. The loblolly boy can fly and is invisible (p. 28). If you were a mythical creature what would you look like and which magical powers would you choose to possess? Briefly describe how you came to have these powers.

10. Michael uses the wind to fly (p. 28). What sports use the wind and air currents?
11. Michael sees Red being 'frog-marched' back to the dormitory (p. 30). Where does this phrase come from?
12. Michael describes the flying gull as a '...life-like model in some brilliant diorama.' (p. 30). Construct a diorama of another animal and its natural habitat.
13. The beach is between some basalt rocky outcrops (p. 33). What type of rock is basalt? Where is it found?
14. The cliffs around the bay have black-backed gulls and shags nesting on them (p. 33). Find out the names of three other sea birds. Research and write an illustrated report on their habitats, food, calls, mating rituals, etc.
15. The author describes the bay and its surrounding landscape (p. 33). Write a descriptive paragraph about a place that is significant to you.
16. Veronica says the telescope is like the Holy Grail (p. 38). Research the Holy Grail and present your findings to your class.
17. Michael states that he could do a 'good Samaritan act' and warn someone about the burglary (p. 39). Research the origins of the 'good Samaritan'? What does the saying imply about Michael's actions? Think of other characters from history whose names have come to indicate a particular quality or action.
18. Jason and Veronica are changed into seals (p. 51). If you had to change into an animal what would it be and why?
19. The sounds and smells of Captain Bass's lunch fill the living room of the shack (p. 56). Write about the sounds and smells of your own lunch or a lunch you wish you could have.
20. Michael flies higher than Everest (p. 58). What is this and how high is it? Locate it on a map of the world.
21. Captain Bass tells Michael about the Collectors (p. 63). Find out if anyone in your class has a collection.
22. Collectors see the loblolly boy as some rare and exotic species, like a snow leopard or a marmoset (p. 61). Research a rare animal and the conservation efforts that are being made to help prevent its extinction.
23. The loblolly boy is as rare as an unused Penny Black for a stamp collector (p. 63). Research this stamp.
24. Michael hopes he will not be reincarnated as a middle-aged woman (p. 69). What is reincarnation? What religion is it found in?
25. The Collector wears stovepipe trousers and a frockcoat (p. 72). Research these items of clothing, draw a picture of them and note when and where they were in fashion.
26. The Collector looks like '...he'd stepped from some nineteenth-century storybook.' (p. 72). Find a story from the nineteenth century. Rewrite the story, then illustrate and bind as a children's book.
27. The Collector reminds Michael of Abraham Lincoln (p. 72). Who is this? Write a one page biography about him.
28. Michael thinks the Collector may be a 'lurker', i.e. 'One of those strange men in the park that mothers warn their children against.' (p. 72). Design a pamphlet about 'stranger danger' for young children.
29. Michael compares Captain Bass to a rock to indicate his strong personality (p. 78). What would be symbolic of you and your classmates' or friends' personalities? Write a song or poem about your friends using this symbolism.

30. Captain Bass tied Michael's gift with nautical knots (p. 81). Find out how to tie some different knots and teach them to your class.
31. Michael compares Bella to a first division goal keeper (p. 85). What sport is he referring to? How many other sports have goal keepers?
32. Mrs Tasker mentions a Kodiak bear (p. 93). Research this animal.
33. Meg asks the loblolly boy if he is an alien from Mars (p. 96). Research recent space missions to Mars, e.g. how they got to Mars, how did they study the planet and what did they find? What alien stories and/or theories do you know?
34. Meg states that the Collector must be an entomologist (p. 105). What does this mean? Find out the name for people who study:
- rocks
 - eyes
 - plants
 - feet
35. As well as The Matheson Gold (p. 106) the Collector has collected other butterflies. What are they (p. 117)? Do an investigative study on butterflies in your local area.
36. Michael describes what it feels like to fly (p. 107). Write your own poetic description of what you think it would feel like to fly.
37. The Collector quotes a line from Keats's poem *Chapman's Homer* (p. 118). Find out who Keats was and write an author study.
38. Draw a picture of the Collector's butterfly display (p. 119).
39. The Collector mentions that he has the skill of the hunter (p. 124). Research and then list the skills you think a successful hunter would need.
40. Michael says that Suzy did a terrifically brave thing when she saved his life (p. 137). Find out about someone in your class, school, family, town, country, etc., who has done something brave. Write about them, what they did and why you think it was brave.
41. Michael tells Meg she and Suzy are his sisters (p. 138). What do you think are the advantages and/or disadvantages of having brothers and sisters?
42. The photograph the twins and Michael have shown them all at Sydney Zoo outside a wombat cage (p. 138). Visit, or research, the zoo closest to you and write about one of the animals that is kept there.
43. Michael thinks the plot has suddenly become very complicated (p. 141). Write a plot summary and/or timeline of your life.
44. Mum watches a reality show on TV (p. 146). In groups, think of an idea for a new reality TV show, create the pitch and present it to your class.
45. When the loblolly boy slips in through the window and lands he lifts his arms like a gold medalist (p. 147). Where were the last Olympics held? How many medalists were there from New Zealand in the last Olympics? What sports did they compete in?
46. Being invisible allows the loblolly boy to play tricks on Mrs Tasker in her classroom (p. 148). Imagine if you were invisible for a day. What would you do?
47. Michael mentions moreporks (p. 153). Are there any other New Zealand native animals or birds mentioned in the book? Think of five other native animals and/or birds. Research and write an illustrated report on their habitats, food, calls, and mating rituals, etc.
48. Suzy and Meg have to do chores around the house (p. 156). List the chores you have to do at home and/or in your classroom.
49. Michael assumes that there must be laws about firing guns in public parks (p. 163). Research the gun laws in New Zealand.

50. Captain Bass lists the many jobs he has had which are linked with the sea (p. 190). Can you think of any more?
51. Michael knows the Collector has a passion for collecting butterflies (p. 195). What is your passion? Take a poll of your classmates' 'passions' too.
52. A football hits Red in his solar plexus (p. 211). What part of the body is this? Locate it on a diagram of the human body.
53. Imagine why the second loblolly boy wanted to exchange places with Ben. Write his story: e.g. where did he come from, what was he trying to escape, how did the loblolly boy manage to change with him, etc.
54. Divide the class into two teams and debate the pros and cons of collecting or keeping rare animals, such as butterflies.
55. Without speaking, act out a character doing something from the book. See how quickly the class can guess who you are and what you are doing.
56. Design your own cover for the novel.
57. Imagine the novel is going to be turned into a stage play. Design the costumes for each character and one or two stage sets.
58. Imagine the novel is going to be turned into a film. Look at other movie posters. Notice the pictures and the words. Design a movie poster to advertise *The Loblolly Boy*.
59. Get into groups of two or three. Choose a scene from the novel. Write a script and act it out in front of the class.
60. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine or newspaper.
61. Write your own version of the back cover blurb.
62. Choose one of the descriptive passages in the novel which you find particularly effective and use it to set the scene or the mood for your own piece of descriptive writing. Quote the passage as the epigraph for your work (and clearly state the source: title, author, publisher, date, chapter, page number).
63. Word Search:
Make as many words as you can by using letters from the words below.

Tasker is a Basket Case (p. 148)

Score a point for each word and 10 bonus points for words of 5 or more letters. Good luck!