

LONGACRE PRESS RESOURCE KIT

Longacre Press Young Adult Fiction

Out of Tune

Joanna Orwin

JASMINE is out to shock. Electric clothes, electric hair, wired behaviour: anything to get approval from the cool kids at school — and *admit it, Jaz* — to force her parents to take notice.

Preoccupied with their own problems, her parents can't see how Jaz's desire to fit in is spinning her out over the edge. Sometimes — hard to confess to her new friends — the only real support Jaz gets is from Gi-Gi, her great-grandmother.

You might say Gi-Gi has a kind of sixth sense. She's given Jaz the diary of their ancestor Maggie, to read aloud during their weekly visits. Maggie, at the same age as Jaz, had to migrate from the Shetland Islands with her family. Where to? Nineteenth-century Stewart Island — a wild, lonely, brutal place, that tested Maggie's spirit sorely. Her diary seems to speak directly to Jaz with dazzling clarity.

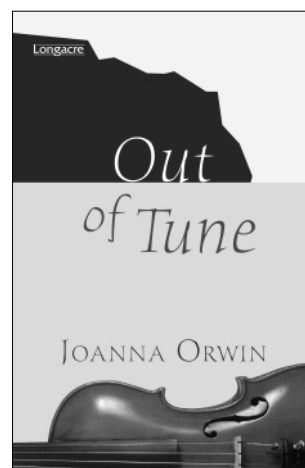
In her latest novel, award-winning writer Joanna Orwin links the past and present beautifully. Her writing is as clean and brisk as the salt spray and fresh winds.

Joanna Orwin's novel *Owl* won the senior fiction category of the 2002 NZ Post Children's Book Awards

RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- **Synopsis**
- **Writing Style**
- **Author inspiration**
- **Editorial comment**
- **Author Profile**
- **Study Notes:**

Research, Writing, Review, Debate, Visual Responses, Creative Written Responses and Literary Critical Responses



SPECIFICATIONS:

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SYNOPSIS:

THIS NOVEL has two narrative threads: the contemporary account of Jasmine's struggles with her peers and parents and her attempts to balance independence with rebellion, contrasted with the account of her ancestor Maggie Mouat's immigration to New Zealand from Shetland in the nineteenth century.

Orwin has created a convincing portrait of the tensions, hopes and disappointments of a tiny immigrant community. All the details of travel, clearing land, raising livestock, building boats, fishing, constructing homes, etc are given a vividly realistic and human dimension. These are people who left a treeless island only to arrive on an island where the impenetrable bush meets the shore. The descriptions, language and narrative of the historical section are superb.

The 21st century teenager, Jasmine, has her trials to deal with: how to fit in with the cool kids, having a close call with an older guy, to body pierce or not, and her consultant dad loses his job. Yet by

comparison to Maggie's experiences, her difficulties are minor – which is part of Orwin's point. Jasmine has access to Maggie's story through the pages of her ancestor's diary. We see Jaz getting increasingly absorbed by Maggie's story, and see her begin to weigh up her own problems against what Maggie had to endure.

The parallel narratives are convincing and appealing. The novel ends subtly and effectively, but not all problems are resolved.

The title *Out of Tune* stems from the fiddle Maggie's father played. He took it with him to their new home: a fiddle he at one time played beautifully but on Stewart Island the wood warped and the fiddle fell silent. A metaphor for many of the story's themes.

This is a standout novel. Joanna won the senior fiction award two years ago with her novel, *Owl*. She's a remarkable talent.

WRITING STYLE:

THIS IS A STORY with two narrative threads – the contemporary account of Jasmine's struggles with her peers and parents, her attempt to balance independence with rebellion, and the historical account of her ancestor Maggie Mount's immigration to New Zealand from Shetland in the nineteenth century. The historical world is convincing and appealing, and the contrast between the two worlds certainly shows the contemporary lass, that compared to Maggie's experiences, her difficulties are minor. The novel ends subtly and effectively without trying to resolve everyone's problems.

The language, descriptions and narrative in the historical thread are powerfully written and the

author has managed to create a convincing portrait of the tensions, hopes and disappointments of a tiny immigrant community. All the details of travel, land clearing, raising livestock, fishing, constructing better homes etc. are given in a vividly realistic, and very human fashion. Maggie is a lively spirit and it's no wonder Jaz is taken with her story.

The dynamic between Jaz and her parents is one most young people will be able to recognise and is finely drawn. The jostling and taunting within Ange's gang is sharply observed and the attraction of this girl is made apparent.

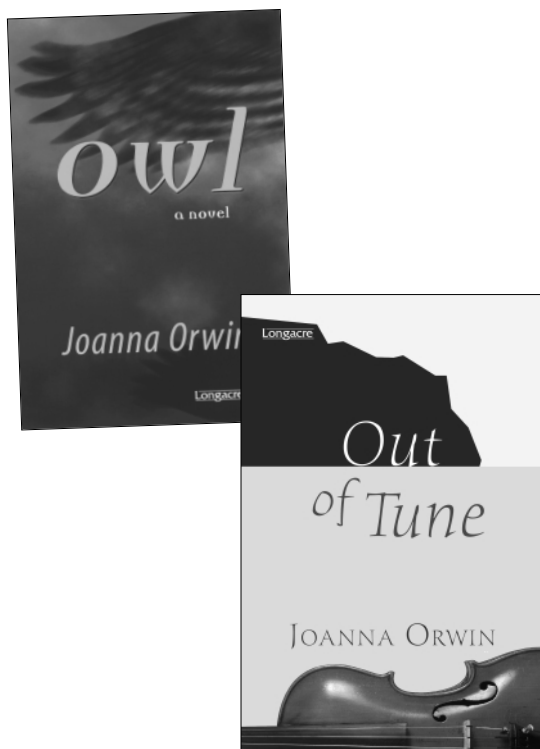
Maggie's world is made more real and accessible by Jasmine's fascination.

The novel is a fine achievement.

AUTHOR INSPIRATION:

THE HISTORY retold here as Maggie's diary did indeed take place at Port William, Stewart Island, in 1872–1873. My version of events is based on official historical records and some reminiscences from descendants of the original Shetland settlers. In my portrayal of life at Port William, I have stuck closely to what actually happened, but the characteristics, motivations, and interactions attributed to my characters are fictional and are in no way intended as portrayals of any of the real people historically involved. Maggie and her family are wholly fictional. Thomas's violin and its fate are true; the instrument belonged to Lawrence Young.

—Joanna Orwin



EDITORIAL COMMENT:

In precise, consistent language Joanna Orwin creates in clear, resonant prose two remarkably distinct voices, each convincing in its evocation of time, place and circumstance. Most significantly, employing a rich vernacular from each period, the author creates two fully-fleshed protagonists, each convincingly of her own time: Jaz the rebellious 21st-century teen, and Maggie, her resourceful forbear.

AUTHOR PROFILE:

JOANNA ORWIN has written several novels for children and young adults. She has also written the story for a children's picture book.

Short-listed four times for the Children's Book Awards, she won the Book of the Year Award in 1986 with *The Guardian of the Land*, and won the Senior Fiction Award in 2002 with her novel *Owl*.

Joanna has worked as a botanist, a science editor, a freelance oral historian, and a consultant non-fiction writer for organisations such as the Forest Research Institute, Department of Conservation, Landcare Research and Te Papa.

Joanna is recognised for her accurate portrayal of Maori culture and history in her novels. She lives in Christchurch and has a grown-up family of three, and loves the outdoor life and tramping.

STUDY NOTES:

RESEARCH

Write a 2–3 page non-fiction newspaper-style article on the following research subjects:

- The history and culture of the Shetland Islands.
- Another world culture where fishing is the main livelihood for its people – find out technical practices and any beliefs or fables associated with their sea-faring or river-faring livelihoods.
- The history of violin making.
- The history of migration, immigration and emigration in your own region.
- The history of religious belief in your own region.
- The history of the Maori people in the South Island of New Zealand.
- The history behind current day ‘body modification’. You might want to extend this to the history of tattooing; where does this practice originate, and how was it spread to other cultures?
- The treatment and care of the elderly in your community.

WRITING

- Write a journal for a period of two weeks. How does writing a daily record of your experiences affect the way you see things?
- Write a diary entry about one of the main events in the novel from Jaz’s point of view.
- Write an essay on the relationship between the past and the present as depicted in *Out of Tune*.
- Write an essay on the role of the diary in *Out of Tune*.
- Write an essay on the generation gap in *Out of Tune*.

REVIEW

Write a review of the novel (a) for a conservative daily newspaper (b) for a current glossy urban magazine.

DEBATE

Divide into affirmative and negative teams and argue the following topics:

1. Peer pressure is destructive to personal freedom.
2. A family’s ancestral past is the foundation for the present.

VISUAL RESPONSES

- Design your own version of the cover for a Australian edition of the novel.
- Use a scene from the book to use as a seed for your own fine arts response.
- Design chapter headings using typography which would suit the historical aspect of the book.

CREATIVE WRITTEN RESPONSES

- Write about a physical location that has changed you in some way. Relate this to the bush-clad island the settlers found at Stewart Island.
- Write a poem or lyric based on the hardships faced by the pioneering families from the Shetlands.
- Do you think *Out of Tune* would make a dramatic film or tv programme? How do you see this working? Write a letter in support of the film for possible investors.

LITERARY CRITICAL RESPONSES

- Write your own version of the back cover blurb.
- Choose five powerful images from the novel. Describe how they create an emotional response.
- Do you think the telling of two stories in tandem is successful in this novel? How do the two stories complement one another?