

CONDUCTOID

Conductoid is not just a rip roaring read for upper primary and lower secondary students. It's also a terrific resource to spark class discussions about character and structure and issues such as role models, bullying, loyalty and pursuing your dreams.

Much of the novel is centred around the school life of Jack and Phoebe. The twins are taught by a host of colourful and eccentric teachers.

Plot Summary

Conductoid is a contemporary story of a boy who is dominated by his dreams and a girl who wishes to surrender all of hers. Fatherless and completely non-identical twins Jack and Phoebe must find a connection if they are to become the link to what has been lost.

Jack is so dreamy he has daydreams within daydreams. They're supposed to be fun, right? Not life threatening? Jack dreams he's a Conductoid – life forms from other dimensions can use their powers on earth through him. One such being, the stony and nameless Master Veriator, transforms him into an array of extraordinary creatures in order to save lives. But you can't be a hero all the time. School life is poor grades, bullies, soccer and extreme hilarity with a line-up of quirky teachers and students.

Red headed, tree frog loving Phoebe, is fast becoming a black belt. This is a benefit of being a diligent, high achieving student and musician - you tend to get whatever you want. Responsibility is the key to her success. She must constantly compensate for her brother, whom she rates much lower than her frogs.

The Master Veriator has Jack refer to him as Azan (*which means teacher*). As time passes the bonds between Jack and his teacher strengthen. He comes to realise Azan may be much more than that. However, Jack must bond with Phoebe to discover the truth surrounding his father and to search for others who have been cast off directionless, into a dimensional labyrinth.

Your own summary

The above summary might help you but everyone remembers a book or film in their own way.

- Write a paragraph (approx. 10 lines) that gives your account of *Conductoid*.

You might find it more difficult than you imagined.

Blurb

The summary differs from what is written on the back of the novel, known as the “*blurb*”. The blurb seeks to immediately grab your attention and make you want to read the book.

- Did you find the “*blurb*” effective? If so, why?
- Write your own “*blurb*” (5 lines at most).

Humour

‘Humour is a way of saying something serious.’ - T.S Eliot.

‘Humour is a rubber edged sword - it allows you to make a point without drawing blood.’ - Mary Hirsch.

‘Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit but the highest form of intelligence.’ - Oscar Wilde.

- Discuss these quotations in relation to *Conductoid*.

Everyone’s sense of humour is different:

- What scenes did you find funny?
- Can you explain why?

Characters

Main characters: Jack, Ty, Phoebe, Skye, Azan.

Teachers: The Shark, Mr Winkle, Mr Brinskie, Fiona McKay, Miss Thornton, Miss Bradbrook, Mr Hartog.

Students: Damon Le Sauvage, Hartley Stone, Moose Mullins, Eve Hannah, Timothy Owens, Suto Ho, Nicholas Rhodes.

There are of course many other characters but the above groups feature prominently.

- Did any of the characters remind you of anybody in your life? Why?
- Aside from the classroom teachers, were there others in the book who fitted into that category? (The Dibbles? Jolly?)
- What qualities do you think are required to be a good teacher?
- Who was the best teacher? Explain your choice? (Comparing them with the worst of the teachers might assist.)
- Throughout the novel the impression of the teachers is told from Jack's perspective. Choose the best teacher from Phoebe's perspective. Again explain your choice.

Language

The author repeatedly uses literary devices throughout the novel such as similes and metaphors:

- Choose three such instances and explain why it was effective.

Eve Hannah's name reads the same backwards:

- Find out the name for such a word?
- Were there any other examples of this technique in the novel?
- Can you think of any other examples?
- What other types of reversals are there in the book, e.g. in the plot or in people's character.

Nicknames feature prominently in the novel:

- What do they convey about the character who refers to the person by the nickname?
- What do the differing uses of nicknames by Jack and Ty tell us about their relationships with that person?

The author creates two contrasting environments. At school the scenes are light and humorous whereas in the dream sequences they are darker with a serious undertone.

- What techniques in style are used to convey these differences? (Are the descriptions more detailed? The characters more sombre?)
- Try creating the darker environment in one of the classroom scenes.

Structure

An author creates structure in a work by plotting and planning, and ensures thematic cohesion by integrating stylistic details into this overall plan.

The opening and closing sentences of a chapter are very important in terms of maintaining tension and engagement with the reader:

- Choose examples in the book and how they work to maintain the suspense and interest.

Illustrations

The illustrations vary between humorous and serious, reflective of the plot developments.

- No illustrations appear in the last seven chapters. Why do you think the author has adopted this approach?
- Choose one of these chapters and do your own illustration.

Themes

Four main themes emerge in the novel.

- Dreams
 - Loyalty
 - Sibling relationships
 - Bullying
- Choose one of these and in a small group discuss how the theme is brought up in the book and what the author is endeavouring to convey. Then prepare a short talk. Use examples from the book to make your point, presenting your findings to the class.

Discussion questions

Dreams

Jack is reluctant to believe in his dreams.

- What do you believe is the biggest obstacle to achieving a dream? How will you overcome that obstacle to achieve your dreams?

Loyalty

Jack and Ty are extremely loyal to one another.

- This is one of their strengths but can loyalty go too far?
- What does blind loyalty mean? Are there examples in the book of this type of devotion?

Sibling relationships

Jack and Phoebe are often at odds. Their feelings towards one another are heartfelt and strong, yet they have many admirable attributes outside of their relationship.

- Why do you think family can bring out the worst in you?
- Do we try as hard in a relationships with our sisters, brothers and parents as we do with our friends?

Bullying

Damon's bullying of the students is transparent.

- Were there other instances of bullying in the novel which weren't so obvious? (What did you think of Suto's initial treatment for example?)
- Why do you think Jack didn't tell the teachers of Damon's bullying? Were his actions correct?

Peer group pressure is one of the most insidious forms of bullying.

- Were there examples of this in the book?

Damon does not have a good relationship with computers. However, cyber bullying is considered to be one of the most forms of bullying.

- Why do you think this is so and how can it be prevented?
- Does your school have an anti-bullying policy and strategies?