



About John Marsden

John Marsden was born in 1950 in Melbourne, the third of four children. From an early age John was a very keen reader, and in grade four he and a friend were encouraged by a teacher to produce a school newspaper, an early start in publication.

After finishing school, John began an Arts/Law degree at Sydney University but soon left for the various delights of truck-driving, working in a mortuary at night, selling pizza, working on a sideshow and guarding Australia's oldest house from vandals. Throughout this time he continued to read voraciously and experiment with writing. At twenty-eight he completed a teaching course and began his career as a teacher. It was while he was Head of English at the Timbertop campus of Geelong Grammar School that, in a three-week vacation, he wrote a novel he called *Diary*. Six publishers rejected it. After some changes to the manuscript, it was finally published by Walter McVitty Books under the title *So Much to Tell You*.

So Much to Tell You won the 1988 Children's Book of the Year Award, the Alan Marshall Award, the KOALA Award and, in America, the Christopher Medal. It was also named as a 'notable book' by the US Library Association. It has become one of Australia's biggest selling novels ever, and has now been published in 16 countries in 11 different languages.

John Marsden has since written numerous books for young people that have delighted, entertained, shocked and moved growing numbers of readers, as well as achieving national and international success. One of his biggest successes has been the War Series, which began with *Tomorrow, When the War Began* in 1994, which won several awards and prizes, and continues with the fifth book, published in 1997, *Burning for Revenge*. In 1996 he was named Austria's most popular author for teenagers and was invited as a special guest of the Swedish Book Fair.

In 1990 John Marsden gave up teaching to write full time. When not travelling, he runs workshops and writing camps at the Tye Estate, just outside Melbourne. In a recent letter from an admirer his correspondent wrote, 'Keep writing and never stop, because not only do I love your stories, I need them too'.

John Marsden feels compelled to write for young people: 'I don't think I have a choice. I write what I feel driven to write.' The response the author receives from his young readers is a constant motivation to keep writing. 'Their responses are so strong, so passionate, so intense and heartfelt. As long as they keep responding to my books the way they do, I'll keep writing for them.'



Ideas for using the assignments

John Marsden's novels provide a rich source of thought-provoking material. He challenges our ideas, ideals, values, attitudes and our social practices, and his writing is direct, gritty and moving.

These assignments on the novels of John Marsden have been designed to encourage students to approach their reading in a manner which is both productive and satisfying, and to think clearly and effectively. The assignments will provide a framework for appreciation of the literature and a basis for discussion of issues and ideas. The questions have been planned so that students are constantly being asked to comprehend, synthesise, analyse, apply, predict and evaluate. The assignments each are composed of three sections: *Exploring the text*, *Think it through, talk it over*, and *Anything goes*. There are far too many questions in each section to be dealt with by the students, or to be corrected by the teacher, to be practical. The idea is to allow teachers and students a degree of choice and flexibility in using the material.

The first section, *Exploring the text*, stimulates students to look closely at the story, the characters, the narrative developments, the conflicts and their resolution. There are many questions to choose from: students can be asked to choose a specific number of questions, or be set questions by the teacher, or a combination (for example, two questions set by the teacher, then a further eight to ten chosen by each student).

The second section, *Think it through, talk it over*, provides thought-provoking sets of questions on themes in the novels, which encourage students to think about the important issues raised, and how they relate to their own values and ideas. These sets of questions can be used as a basis for class discussions or small-group discussions, or as a basis for a more in-depth written response. When working through the questions, it is important that students explain and justify the position they adopt. There are no right or wrong answers; the idea is to encourage the students to adopt well-thought-out positions, rather than just giving unsupported opinions. Careful questioning by the teacher can promote lively and very productive discussion. The aim of the questions is to avoid stereotyped thinking and stimulate students to pose their own questions arising from the discussion.

The third section, *Anything goes*, gives students the opportunity to let their imaginations run free. They can choose activities that take a character or idea from the novels and use these as the basis for a creative response in any form, including collage, painting, poetry, drawing, making board games, portraits, murals ... the list is endless!

Above all, these assignments are designed to encourage students to explore, appreciate and be stimulated by literature on all its many levels.