

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

***Bye, Beautiful* by Julia Lawrinson**

For Year 9- 10

Background

In Australia in 1966, times were, finally, changing. Menzies resigned, decimal currency was introduced and Methodist ministers had started to speak out against Viet Nam. The Beatles and the Easybeats were fighting each other for prime position on the charts, and the Seekers, Frank Sinatra and Johnny Young filled the spaces they left. The Pill had not long been introduced, and its prescription was mainly limited to married women – doctors who did otherwise were at risk of being considered immoral...the secret histories of our society – of adoption, of race, of why things changed – should be talked about.

Julia Lawrinson 'The Particular Kinds of Silence' *Viewpoint: on books for young adults* 14 (3) 2006 pp. 14-15.

It is January 1966 and Sandy is going on fourteen when her family moves to a dry, wheat belt West Australian country town from Perth, during a dusty summer. Laurence (12) and Marianne (17) are her siblings. It is a time of change in Australia society and 'the swinging sixties' are about to challenge many of the social conventions documented in this story - feminism, black power, anti Vietnam demonstrations, the pill and mini-skirts are just over the horizon. Towards the end of the novel the Commonwealth Referendum of 1967 is passed, which ends constitutional discrimination against Aboriginal people who have been since then, counted in the national census. This adds to the poignancy of the story.

Bye, Beautiful is a rich, emotional novel that captures in detail, a recent time in Australia's history that nevertheless seems like a foreign country. It is an impeccable evocation of an Australia that deserves to stay in the past.

Objectives

At Level 6, students read, view, analyse, critique, reflect on and discuss contemporary and classical imaginative texts that explore personal, social, cultural and political issues of significance to their own lives.... They explain how texts are shaped by the time, place and cultural setting in which they are created. Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 6* p 25.

Focus: Historical setting, detail, attitudes

- Why has society changed so much? Create a class graffiti board or blog of what behaviours, clothing, food and attitudes strike the students as different from today. They can add to it as they are reading.

Below are some examples to set the process rolling, but students might identify different ones:

- Frank wouldn't let Glad drive 'of course' (p18).
- 'She was accustomed to Laurence coming first in their parents' affections, and Marianne and Sandy, being girls, tying for second place...' (p19).
- Dot Read says regarding Marianne's engagement: 'Better than going teaching or nursing and then ending up on the shelf, if you ask me' (p19).
 - What is 'being left on the shelf?'
 - What does it tell us about Dot?
- The young people in the book often eat a bag of mixed lollies.
- The family has a 'wireless' rather than radio, a 'record player' rather than a cd player (p35).
- Frank has control over how Marianne combs her hair (p35).
 - Find examples of hair styles from the period from magazines/ family photos/ record covers etc.
 - What does 'back combed' look like?
- Frank does not allow his daughters to wear shorts 'in front of the house' and insists that Marianne keep her hair 'off her face' (p36).
- Frank says to Laurence 'You will not speak until and unless you are spoken to, is that clear?' (p82) and to Marianne 'You're not too old for me to tan your backside' (p83).
- Glad doesn't go to visit Marianne in Perth (p257). Discuss the reasons.
 - Does she no longer love her daughter?
 - Is she ashamed of her? Is she frightened of Frank?
 - Does she 'choose' Frank over Marianne?

- What are the possibilities?
- How would you feel if you were Marianne?

Dialogue

What people say to each other in the story, compared to the language, tone and tenor used today is most revealing of changed attitudes and times.

- Record and/or write the conversations you have at home with your parents and/or siblings and compare with the dialogue in this book.
- Pat says of May 'They tell me she's a smart one, that one, but smart won't get you very far if you're acting like that' (p75). Translate this – and any other selected examples – into how it would be said now.

Music

- What is an HMV minigram? (p67) Marianne only has two 'records'. How many cds do you have, or songs on your iPods?
- Play some of the music that is referred to in the novel, such as on page 174 - The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Easybeats. Why have some groups and their music survived to the present and others not?

Houses

- Description of Nanna's house (p118-199).
- Sandy's description of the Lansing's house (p22-3).
 - Would Marianne/Glad/Frank describe it differently? How?
- Write a description of your house/flat etc from the point of view of one who likes it, and then one who does not.

Fashion

What the girls were allowed to wear as well as what they wore tells us much about how things have changed.

- Marianne's dress made from nylon with a hem 'above the knee' (p159). Consider that the miniskirt was not long away.
- Sandy had not had a new dress in a year (p159).
- Marianne is allowed to 'practise' (p161) with an old lipstick of her mother's when Frank is not around.

- Billy and Taffy wear 'stovepipe pants and crisp white shirts' (p169).
- From the descriptions available, create the clothes that the characters wear.

Food and drink

This is carefully researched, and like the clothes, provides insights particularly into family life of the period.

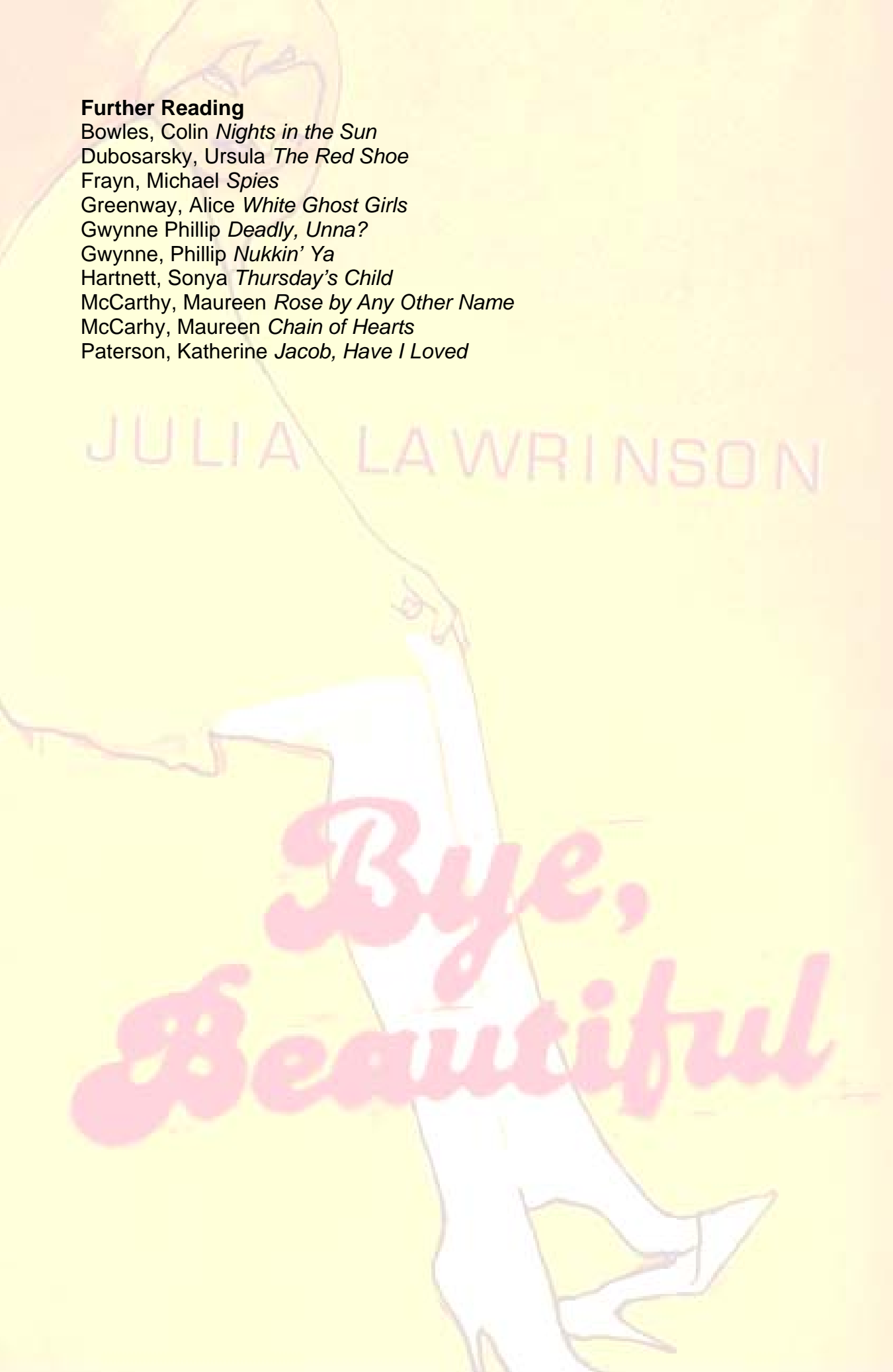
- The Lansings go to the 'grocery' (pp17-18) (there is no supermarket).
 - What is bought – are the items still available?
 - Search the internet to find old advertisements, labels, etc or look at old family photos, visit museums etc.
- Even though it is so hot the family eats peas, mashed potato and chops – two for Frank and one for everyone else (p36). They frequently eat a cooked breakfast.
- Read the description of the food for the dance (p154). What food do you have at a party?
- Dot asks for a 'shandy' (p91) - a 'woman's drink'. What is it?
- Glad puts out her new height-of-fashion 'Tupperware wheel' (p92) with segments filled with peanuts, olives, cheese squares, pickled onions, 'rolled slices of polony held together by toothpicks'.
 - What would the food be today and how would it be served?

Assessment

Interview older relatives and friends about their childhoods.

Research the attitudes and domestic rituals of lives during this period.

- For example, find Australian magazines, such as the *Australian Women's Weekly* and *Woman's Day*. Examine the advertisements and newspapers of the time, and the television shows (television – black and white - came to Western Australia in 1959). This might be done before or during reading to heighten the sense of this period in Australian history that is so powerfully evoked in the book.
- Comb through family photograph albums and/or do a Google image search for the period, and create a photomontage of the era. Choose carefully to highlight what was valued and important as revealed in the photograph.



Further Reading

Bowles, Colin *Nights in the Sun*

Dubosarsky, Ursula *The Red Shoe*

Frayn, Michael *Spies*

Greenway, Alice *White Ghost Girls*

Gwynne Phillip *Deadly, Unna?*

Gwynne, Phillip *Nukkin' Ya*

Hartnett, Sonya *Thursday's Child*

McCarthy, Maureen *Rose by Any Other Name*

McCarthy, Maureen *Chain of Hearts*

Paterson, Katherine *Jacob, Have I Loved*

JULIA LAWRIKSON

*Bye,
Beautiful*