

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

***Doppelganger* by Michael Parker**

YEAR 10

Background

The idea that fascinated me was what would an average middle class thug in Australia be like if by chance he had been born in Nazi Germany or 1990s Serbia? ...and so I came up with the idea of two parallel Sydneys. The middle class one we know, and another which is gangland violence and anarchy. Put the 'same character' in each and so we have a middle class bully, Josh, in the real Sydney, and his Doppelganger in the parallel Sydney – a brutal gangland leader. Then we can explore whether or not they really still are the same person. ...I also want [the readers] to have stopped and thought about what moral responsibility really entails and whether there is indeed a Heart of Darkness at the core of people.

Michael Parker in *Viewpoint: on books for young adults*, 14 (4) Summer, 2006 p 21.

Objectives

There are extensive notes on *Doppelganger* produced by Amanda Kaye and the author. The notes offer recommendations for focuses for different ability levels. The area that we would like to explore offers something for all readers, so we have focussed on what Kaye and Parker refer to as 'The Big Issues'.

Students use writing to explore different perspectives on complex and challenging issues. Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 6* p 24.

Focus: The Big Issues

In the book

- Is Andrew guilty of murder?
- Who is more morally questionable, Andrew or Josh?
- Parker has stated that the core lines in the book for him are those said by Kurtz: 'some people get lives that *let* them do things... other people get

lives that *make* them do things' (p281).

- How can Andrew be both attracted to, and repelled by, the violence and power in the alternate Sydney?
- Why do Skinner's moral actions provide no safe guard for him?

In a wider context

- If evil exists what makes it so?
- Is it ok to kill someone bad to save someone good?
- Is there a difference between evil acts and evil people?
- Do some people deserve to die?
- Do you think you could kill to protect someone you love?
- Is violence ever right?


Philosophical/religious belief systems

- Is there a belief system or philosophy that informs your ideas about these questions?
- Kaye and Parker refer to the ideas of three philosophers in the Teaching Unit – Hobbes, Rousseau, Arendt – which provide differing points of view about the nature of good and evil.
- The religions of the world also take positions - such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism.
- Do your beliefs coincide with, or are challenged by, any of these views?

Assessment

Kaye and Parker's suggestion of recreating a Jerry Springer Show around 'I tried to kill my best friend, but I'm still the good guy', fits well with the stated objective of exploring the big issues contained in the book. This could be followed by a peer assessment of the activity:

- What three new things about *Doppelganger* have you learnt from viewing this performance?

- 
- Identify an aspect you feel could have been done better.
 - Identify one aspect of the performance that connected with your response to/ideas about the text.
 - What question would you have asked?
 - Kaye and Parker suggest creating extra scenes for the book as a film script.
 - Consider approaching this idea in another format – storyboard, computer animation or write the new scenes in Parker's own narrative style.

Further Reading

Core influences for Parker:

Bladerunner (movie) based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Phillip K Dick

Conrad, Joseph *Heart of Darkness*

Cormier, Robert *The Chocolate War*

Gaiman, Neil *The Anansi Boys; Coraline; Neverwhere*

Golding, William *Lord of the Flies*

Other related texts:

Caswell, Brian *Double Exposure*

Cormier, Robert *We all Fall Down; Tenderness;*

Hartnett, Sonya *Surrender; Princes*

Innocenti, Roberto and Ian McEwan *Rose Blanche*

Kelleher, Victor *Red Heart; Slow Burn; Del-Del*

Lowry, Lois *The Giver*

McDonald, Caroline *Secret Lives*

McFarlane, Peter *The Enemy you Killed*

Monk, Scott *Boys R Us*

Nix, Garth *Shade's Children*

Nunn, Cameron *Shadows in the Mirror*

Westerfeld, Scott *Peeps; The Last Days*

Wild, Margaret & Spudvilas, Anne *Woolvs in the Sitee*