



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper secondary

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding; Intercultural Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Analyse use of language, metaphor and literary devices
- Analyse a text with a distinctly Australian setting and characters
- Discuss resilience, isolation and the power of human connection
- Discuss social and economic inequality
- Discuss gender, masculinity, romantic relationships and domestic violence
- Encourage creative writing

THEMES

- Nature vs nurture
- Life and death
- Man vs environment
- Love
- Social attitudes

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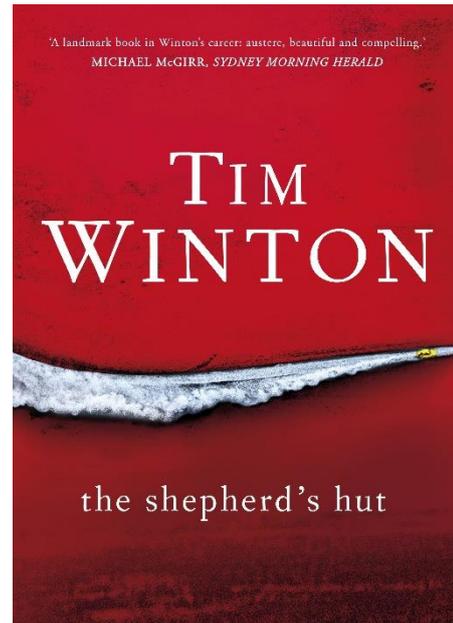
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The Shepherd's Hut Tim Winton

PLOT SUMMARY

A rifle-shot of a novel – crisp, fast, shocking – *The Shepherd's Hut* is an urgent masterpiece about solitude, unlikely friendship, and the raw business of survival.

Jaxie dreads going home. His mum's dead. The old man bashes him without mercy, and he wishes he was an orphan. But no one's ever told Jaxie Clackton to be careful what he wishes for.

In one terrible moment his life is stripped to little more than what he can carry and how he can keep himself alive. There's just one person left in the world who understands him and what he still dares to hope for. But to reach her he'll have to cross the vast saltlands on a trek that only a dreamer or a fugitive would attempt.

The Shepherd's Hut is a searing look at what it takes to keep love and hope alive in a parched and brutal world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Winton has published twenty-nine books for adults and children, and his work has been translated into twenty-eight languages. Since his first novel, *An Open Swimmer*, won the Australian Vogel Award in 1981, he has won the Miles Franklin Award four times (for *Shallows*, *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and *Breath*) and twice been shortlisted for the Booker Prize (for *The Riders* and *Dirt Music*). He lives in Western Australia.

CHARACTERS

Jaxie Clackton

Questions

- How does Jaxie describe himself in the opening paragraphs? What sort of person does he appear to be?
- How does he feel about others?
- At the start of the novel, what do you think may have happened to him?
- How does the harshness of Jaxie's language help to shape his character?

Jaxie's father (Sid)

Questions

- How did Jaxie's father treat his wife and son? What evidence is there to support this?
- What other social norms did he violate?
- What type of role model did he provide for his son?
- In a small town, why would Sid have held so much power?
- Why would Sid and the policeman have been best friends? What are the implications of this relationship?

Jaxie's mother (Shirley)

Questions

- What relationship did Jaxie have with his mother?
- How was she treated by Jaxie's father?
- Why do you think she didn't stand up for herself?
- Why is Jaxie angry about her decision to stay with his dad?
- Do you think she should have left?
- Jaxie blames himself for not rescuing his mother. 'That's something I gotta live with. I didn't get her free. Didn't have the brains. Or the guts.' (pp 20–1)

Do you think this is a fair criticism? What could he have done?

- 'She was the one with guts. Said she stayed for me. And you don't know what that's like, how something that good and pure can feel so filthy.' (p 21) Do you think Shirley stayed for Jaxie's sake? Why does he find this notion 'filthy'?
- What do the photographs on the piano reveal about Shirley? See p 62.
- Why does Jaxie convince himself that she didn't really love him? See p 39.

Fintan MacGillis

Questions

- Why does Fintan sing and talk to himself?
- How does he react to Jaxie's arrival?
- Even though he fears Jaxie has been sent for him, how does he treat him?
- How does Jaxie react to Fintan showing him compassion?
- How does Fintan slowly gain Jaxie's trust?
- What sort of role model does Fintan provide for Jaxie? What positive attributes does he display?

THEMES

Nature vs nurture

Questions

- Jaxie is worried that he shares blood with his father and will therefore share his nature. What do they have in common? What evidence is there that Jaxie will not follow his father's example?
- Jaxie's father presented an example of toxic masculinity. Is Fintan a better role model?
- What negative behaviours would Jaxie have learnt from his father? What positive behaviours might he have learnt from him?
- What might Jaxie have learnt from his mother?
- While no one would wish Jaxie's brutal life upon him, how did his childhood make him resilient and turn him into a survivor?
- Jaxie wonders if people start out vicious (see p 37). What do you think? What experiences might make a person become vicious?
- What do Shirley's memories on her deathbed suggest about Sid's character? Do you think he was always the cruel man Jaxie knew?



- How does Winton depict Jaxie's intelligence? Why does he struggle so much at school? Is Jaxie rejected by the other kids at school or does he push them away? See p 43.
- Why might Jaxie create a violent or negative persona as a means of surviving at school?
- How might this persona trap Jaxie into being someone he does not want to be?
- Jaxie develops a positive relationship with a teacher who recognises his intelligence. What impact does this teacher have on Jaxie when he offers to lend him his telescope?
- How does Jaxie react when the teacher leaves the school? How might Jaxie's experience have been different if the teacher had stayed?
- What impact can teachers have on their students, especially in country towns?
- How does the school system fail Jaxie? With the right influence, might Jaxie have experienced academic success? How would this have changed his life?
- When Jaxie grows suspicious of the reason behind Fintan's exile, he threatens him with his rifle. 'I'd never pointed a firearm at a human being before. It's a fucking low thing to do if you're not scared for your life.' (p 160) Afterwards he takes a long time to calm down. Given his father's behaviour, why would this have been particularly emotional for Jaxie?
- Consider the way Jaxie hesitates to shoot the men who are attacking Fintan. What does this suggest about him following in his father's footsteps?
- Read the article 'About the Boys: Tim Winton on how toxic masculinity is shackling men to misogyny'

theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/09/about-the-boys-tim-winton-on-how-toxic-masculinity-is-shackling-men-to-misogyny.

How are these concerns reflected and addressed in *The Shepherd's Hut*?

Life and death

Questions

- Read Jaxie's description of his father's lifeless body on page 12. Why does he describe it this way? What does that tell us about his feelings?
- What is the significance of Sid being a butcher? How might he view death?
- What differentiates dead meat from a living creature?
- How does Sid's view of meat carry over into his relationship with people?
- Is there such a thing as a good death? Did Shirley, Sid or Fintan have a good death?
- What keeps Jaxie alive and determined to survive? Why has Fintan kept himself alive all this time?
- Winton never tells us what caused Sid to be so damaged, but he hints at an involvement in war. How might this have affected him?
- Why do you think Fintan was exiled? What did he see? How has it affected him?
- How do we know that Fintan has accepted his death? What aspects of his life would help him with this?
- Why does Winton show us two characters, one at the start of his journey and the other at its end? What might this suggest about his thoughts on life and death?
- In what way can Fintan be seen to have achieved his purpose before he dies? How has he helped to improve Jaxie's future?

Man vs environment

Questions

- Jaxie says about the desert to the east, 'Only a proper blackfella could live out there and there's none of them left, so I wouldn't be trying it on.' (p 31) What knowledge do you think Jaxie would have of Indigenous Australians? How might this affect the way he lives in and moves through the land?
 - Fintan says, 'A man alone reverts to his animal nature [. . .] That's not to say he becomes a beast.' (p 128) In what ways has Fintan become more like an animal? In what ways can this be seen to be a positive?
- In contrast, how are the people in the town depicted?
- Consider how Jaxie's father dealt with the bees (see p 162). What does this reveal about his character? What does it suggest about his attitude to nature?
 - Fintan lives very lightly on the land, with no electricity. He kills only what he needs to survive and is extremely resourceful. How does the presence of the old mines and the hydroponic crop contrast with this? What does this suggest about the human impact upon the environment?



- How does the environment help to heal both Jaxie and Fintan?
- In his book *Island Home*, Tim Winton writes:
‘There is no denying the fact that there’s something physically relentless about Australia, but there’s also something hauntingly paradoxical, for to even the most reverent observer it sometimes feels as if this continent is more air than matter, more pause than movement, more space than time. The place is still itself. It continues to impose. It imprints itself upon the body, and in order to make sense of it the mind is constantly struggling to catch up.’ (p 20)

How is this reflected in *The Shepherd's Hut*?

Love

Questions

- Why does Jaxie cling to his relationship with Lee?
 - Do you think their relationship was as physical as Jaxie suggests? How might his attitude to sex be shaped by his experiences with his father?
 - How does Jaxie view love? What do you make of his reasons for pursuing a relationship with his cousin? See p 84.
 - What does Jaxie gain from his relationship with Lee that he lacks elsewhere in his life?
 - Why does Jaxie want to bring Lee wildflowers? What does that reveal about him?
 - Why does Jaxie have such trust issues? How has he been let down by others in his life?
 - Fintan tries to persuade Jaxie to stay with him, at least until he is physically restored. Do you think he wants this for Jaxie’s sake or his own?
 - What does Jaxie suggest the benefits of companionship might be? See the passage starting on p 171.
 - How do Jaxie and Fintan become more of a family than Jaxie ever had?
 - Jaxie craves stability and security. How does he find this in each of Lee, Fintan and the environment? How does he react whenever this security is challenged?
 - Why is Jaxie so furious when he believes that Fintan has looked at photos of Lee on his phone? Why does he not believe that Fintan is genuinely upset by his reaction? See p 183.
 - How does his relationship with Fintan change Jaxie?
- Jaxie also seems to have an impact on Fintan. Although he never reveals his whole story, Fintan apparently comes closer to confessing to Jaxie than to anyone else. Why?
 - How does Jaxie’s love for Lee save him at the end of the novel? What do we need in life to be able to continue?
 - How has love affected Jaxie’s life in both positive and negative ways?

Social attitudes

Questions

- Because of his father’s abuse, Jaxie is scared that when people find out that his father is dead they will assume he killed him. This implies that people knew about Sid’s behaviour. Why did people turn a blind eye?
- Consider the physical relationship between Jaxie and Lee. How do Sid, Margie and Shirley react to this relationship? Why is it more unacceptable than Sid’s treatment of his wife and son?
- What caused Jaxie and Kenny Chen to become friends (see p 45)? What did they have in common and what did they both gain from the friendship? Why did their friendship end? What does this reveal about social attitudes?
- How does Jaxie react when he suspects Fintan may be a paedophile?

MOTIFS AND SYMBOLISM

The environment

Questions

- Consider Winton’s descriptions of the environment. How do the animals behave in contrast to the humans?
- Why does Jaxie like the sounds of the birds and the wildlife? What does this reveal about his character?
- What evidence is there in the novel of the ways in which humans are destroying the environment?
- We often hear reports of people getting lost in the bush. How do Fintan and Jaxie find themselves during their time in the bush?
- Fintan describes the bush as ‘Hell itself’ (p 151). What challenges would he have faced during his isolation? How has he managed to adapt to his environment?



- Would Jaxie have been a different person if he had lived in the city rather than the country? What skills and knowledge did he have that ensured his survival?
- On p 153, Jaxie asks Fintan why he doesn't leave, given there is no one to stop him. What does Fintan's reply tell us about him?
- Fintan's exile was a result of greed, money and possibly corruption. How do these forces reappear at the novel's conclusion?
- What do you think Winton's views of modern society might be?
- What is the significance of Jaxie burying Fintan in the salt and his attackers in the mine?
- How does modern society threaten the environment, religion and people? What dangers are suggested?

Music

Questions

- What role does music play in the novel? Consider the significance of:
 - Shirley's piano (which she no longer plays)
 - Shirley singing in a choir
 - Fintan singing to himself
 - The wildlife creating a form of music
 - Jaxie finding music in silence
- What healing power can music have for people?
- What role does music play in religion?
- How does music serve as a contrast to the brutality of the environment and the story?

Violence

Questions

- This is a story with much harshness and brutality. What might Winton be saying about people and life? Consider all the ways coarseness and violence appear in the story.
 - The unforgiving land
 - Sid's beatings
 - People's inhumanity to one another
 - Jaxie's language
 - The reaction to Jaxie and Lee's relationship
 - Fintan's death
 - The need to kill to survive

- Why do you think Fintan sings 'The Wild Colonial Boy'? In what ways does this song relate to Jaxie's experience, and in what ways does it relate to Fintan's life?

There was a wild colonial boy,
Jack Duggan was his name
He was born and raised in Ireland,
in a place called Castlemaine
He was his father's only son,
his mother's pride and joy
And dearly did his parents love
the wild colonial boy

At the early age of sixteen years,
he left his native home
And to Australia's sunny shore,
he was inclined to roam
He robbed the rich, he helped the poor,
he shot James MacEvoy
A terror to Australia was
the wild colonial boy

One morning on the prairie,
as Jack he rode along
A-listening to the mocking bird,
a-singing a cheerful song
Up stepped a band of troopers:
Kelly, Davis and Fitzroy
They all set out to capture him,
the wild colonial boy

Surrender now, Jack Duggan,
for you see we're three to one.
Surrender in the Queen's high name,
you are a plundering son
Jack drew two pistols from his belt,
he proudly waved them high.
'I'll fight, but not surrender,'
said the wild colonial boy

He fired a shot at Kelly,
which brought him to the ground
And turning round to Davis,
he received a fatal wound
A bullet pierced his proud young heart,
from the pistol of Fitzroy
And that was how they captured him,
the wild colonial boy

- How does Fintan use the song as a mask or to suggest madness?
- What significance does the song take on at the end of the novel? Do you think Fintan uses it to give Jaxie permission to be violent?



- Jaxie believes that he and Fintan made themselves vulnerable because he didn't stay savage (see p 237). Do you agree? Do you think they could have escaped this fate?
- Why were the men so violent towards Fintan, a vulnerable old man? What does this reveal about them, and indeed about humanity?
- Is Jaxie's killing of the men different from their attack on Fintan?

Binaries

Questions

- Winton presents a number of binaries within the novel. Consider how the following ideas are set in opposition:
 - Good vs evil
 - Acceptable vs unacceptable behaviour
 - Sanity vs insanity
 - Confidence vs vulnerability
 - Isolation vs peacefulness
 - Exile vs sanctuary
 - Heaven vs hell
 - Life vs death
 - Love vs hate
 - Acceptance vs abandonment
 - Humans vs nature
- What is the impact of establishing these binaries in the novel? What message does it help to convey?

Religion

Questions

- Jaxie appears to be uncertain about his religious beliefs, but he is spiritual in many ways.

'So I figure even if you don't believe any of that crap you're always praying to something, or someone. Even when you shout at the TV, when you talk to cats and yell at cars.' (p 24)

Why do even non-believers pray?
- Consider the religious references in the novel
 - The town of Monkton
 - Fintan bathing Jaxie
 - The idea of 'confession'
 - Fintan sharing his food with Jaxie

- Someone bringing Fintan supplies every Easter and Christmas
- The shepherd's hut – in what way might Fintan be a shepherd?

- Fintan is sent into exile, but does it in fact offer him salvation?
- What are the beads that Fintan has? What does it reveal that he still has them after all these years, even when he is uncertain about his beliefs?
- Both Jaxie and Fintan first thought the rocks by the salt lake were people, and Fintan dreams of telling his secrets to them. What does this suggest about confession and worship? What do you think the rocks might be?

- Do Jaxie and Fintan find spirituality in nature?

How can you be a priest and not believe in God?

I don't now, [Fintan] said. Sometimes you do. The rest of the time you settle for just believing in the Church. It's like family, lad. What else do we have? (p 229)

- What does Fintan mean by believing in the Church rather than in God? What does this comment suggest about why people are drawn to religion?
- What does Fintan mean when he says 'God is what you do, not what or who you believe in [. . .] when you make good – well, then you are an instrument of God'? See p 233.
- Does Jaxie turn out to be an instrument of God? What comfort might he gain from Fintan's words?
- In his book *The Boy Behind the Curtain*, Winton reveals that his parents became quite religious after his father recovered from a near fatal accident. He writes:

It's no small achievement to confound a copper's lowered expectations of humankind, for that's a tough carapace to penetrate [. . .] Later he said that during his convalescence he'd had a lot of time to think [. . .] But when there's so much opportunity for people to be vile, it strikes me as a miracle that they choose mercy, restraint and decency as often as they do. (pp 42–3)

Is this reflected in *The Shepherd's Hut*? Who chooses mercy, restraint and decency, and who doesn't?



LITERARY DEVICES

Language

Questions

- Why is Jaxie's language so harsh and abrasive? What does it reveal about his education and upbringing?
- Jaxie also uses quite poetic language. Give some examples of this. Why has Winton created this contrast within his character?
- In what ways is Fintan's language more soothing than Jaxie's?
- Jaxie comments on the fact that Fintan 'said things fancy and musical, it was like camouflage and you knew he'd been doing this all his life, hiding in clear sight.' (p 137) What does he mean by this? How can someone use language as camouflage?
- Even when he is afraid, Fintan manages to keep his language calm and polite. What does this suggest about his character and his background?
- Consider the power of words. At the novel's conclusion, why does Fintan refuse to betray Jaxie's whereabouts?
- Jaxie claims to be a loner, yet he feels the need to share his story. Why?
- Jaxie says 'us Clacktons never done our thinking out loud.' (p 234) How might their lives have been different if they had all communicated more?
- Tim Winton's father was a policeman and his wife was a nurse. Consider the experiences they would have faced each day. What would have been the danger of keeping their thoughts and feelings bottled up? How is this notion explored in *The Shepherd's Hut*?

Narration and point of view

Questions

- Many of the characters in the novel are silenced. Choose a character other than Jaxie and briefly tell their story. Consider how their account may be different from Jaxie's.
 - Sid
 - Shirley
 - Lee
 - Aunty Marg
 - Kenny Chen
- If you were to write the scene when Jaxie and Fintan first meet from Fintan's point of view, how might it change?
- Do you think Jaxie is a reliable narrator? Do you believe everything he tells us?
- Jaxie tells this story after the events have already happened. How might hindsight have influenced his story, especially his depiction of Fintan? Would he have presented him in such a sympathetic manner if Fintan had not died?
- The novel opens with Jaxie driving away from Fintan's hut, and Winton uses a number of examples of foreshadowing throughout the novel. We know for a long time that the story Jaxie is telling will not end well. Make a list of any examples of foreshadowing you can find. What do they add to your reading of the story? Why might an author use these narrative devices?
- Consider the ending of the story. Did you find it satisfactory? What do you predict Jaxie will do? What could he have done differently, and what choices are still open to him?



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
The Shepherd's Hut (Hardback, paperback to be published in March 2019)	Tim Winton	9780143786115	11-12	\$39.99		
Island Home <i>Teachers' Resources available</i>	Tim Winton	9780143574095	11-12	\$24.99		
Blueback <i>Teachers' Resources available</i>	Tim Winton	9780143304333	11-12	\$17.99		
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