

Book Club Notes
Calypso Summer
written by Jared Thomas

Book Club Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

ABOUT THE BOOK

Calypso Summer is a story told by Calypso, a young Nukunu man, fresh out of high school in Rastafarian guise. After failing to secure employment in sports retail, his dream occupation, Calypso finds work at the Henley Beach Health Food shop where his boss pressures him to gather Aboriginal plants for natural remedies. Growing up in Adelaide with little understanding of his mother's traditional background, Calypso endeavours to find the appropriate native plants. This leads him to his Nukunu family in Port Augusta and the discovery of a world steeped in cultural knowledge. The support of a sassy, smart, young Ngadjuri girl, with a passion for cricket rivalling his own, helps Calypso to reconsider his Rastafarian façade and understand how to take charge of his future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Jared Thomas is a Nukunu person of the Southern Flinders Ranges and an Arts Development Officer at Arts, South Australia. Jared's play *Flash Red Ford* toured Uganda and Kenya in 1999 and his play *Love, Land and Money* featured during the 2002 Adelaide Fringe Festival. Jared's young adult novel, *Sweet Guy*, was shortlisted for the 2009 South Australian People's Choice Awards for Literature and his children's book, *Dallas Davis, the Scientist and the City Kids* is published by the Oxford University Press Yarning Strong series. Jared's writing explores the power of belonging and culture. He lives in Adelaide with his partner and two daughters.

REVIEWS AND QUOTES

"Thomas brings the reader into Calypso's world, vividly capturing his language and his large and vibrant family."

- Heath Graham, Books + Publishing

“Jared Thomas has so perfectly captured the voice of young Calypso – a young man torn between cultures but blind to his own identity.”

- Danielle Binks, ALPHA Reader

“A refreshingly local story of love and family and finding your place in the world by an Aboriginal Adelaide author”

- Katharine England, Adelaide Advertiser

THEMES

- Identity
- Relationships
- Aboriginal Histories and Cultures
 - Importance of country, kin, community, bush medicines traditions and lore
- Personal journeys
- Respect

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is Calypso initially reluctant to ask relatives about Aboriginal bush medicines?
2. What does Calypso learn about himself and his people during his trips to Aunty Janet's?
3. What does Uncle Ray mean when he says, 'you're here but you don't understand what being here means yet'? (p75)
4. Why hasn't Calypso's mum been home to visit her family for such a long time? What is holding her back?
5. Why does Calypso burn the money given to him by Run?
6. What does Bruce mean when he says, 'if you don't make things better for yourself, you're letting the fellas that did all the bad stuff get at you'? How can Bruce's point be applied to your own life?
7. Discuss your response to the following extract from the text: 'The earth, the moon and the stars are round and time goes round in a circle. Our past, present and future are all connected to each other. What we did yesterday affects today, and what we do today affects tomorrow.' (p98)
8. Bruce explains to Calypso, 'that's the amazing thing about our mob. They didn't need to cut things down or have electricity. They just learnt to live with the land in a way that made them comfortable.' (p98) Discuss this in context with the notions of sustainable living and respect for country.

9. What is 'the Dreaming' and how is this concept connected to the Aboriginal way of living?
10. How has the granting of native title led to problems with exploitation and a new way of 'taking away'?
11. Why do you think Calypso hasn't asked Run to move out earlier? What is holding him back from being more influential in Run's life?
12. Why does Vic trick Calypso by giving him itchy pods? What point is he trying to make?
13. In what way does Clare help Calypso find his true identity?
14. Discuss the way in which government decisions have impacted on Indigenous ways of life. What effect has cattle and sheep grazing had on native lands?
15. Discuss Calypso's comments about the negative aspects of smoking *ganja*.
16. What is Calypso really letting go of when he decides to cut off his dreadlocks?
17. This is a coming-of-age story. What connections can you make between Calypso's journey and your own?