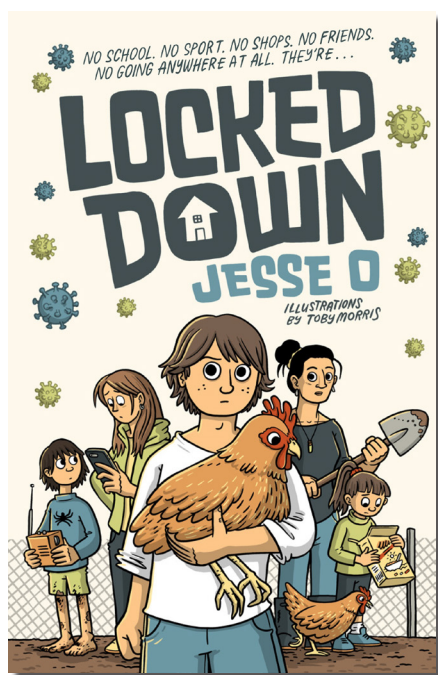


## Teacher Notes

Before reading \* Close reading questions  
Themes \* Characters \* Writing style and language activities  
Illustrations \* Further research and creative activities



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Age: 9+

## LOCKED DOWN

Jesse O with illustrations by Toby Morris

Originally published in 2011, this prescient and gripping novel about a nation in lockdown was written following the H1N1 global pandemic. It won a Storylines Junior Fiction Award.

The deadly influenza pandemic XB276 is sweeping the country. Twelve-year-old Zac wakes up one morning to the news that everyone must stay home.

He can't leave the house for weeks, or even months. Pretty soon he's facing running out of food, with no electricity, no telephone and no internet. The only people he can count on are his family and closest neighbours.

As Zac faces each new challenge living under lockdown, he discovers resources he never knew he had - and mysteries begging to be solved.

### About the author

Jessica Le Bas is an award-winning poet and author who divides her time between Nelson, New Zealand and Rarotonga. As well as being mother to seven children, she has variously worked for the United Nations, as a truck driver, a restaurant manager and a high school teacher.

In 2010 the novel *Staying Home*, her first work for children, was published under the pseudonym Jesse O. It was researched and written after the outbreak of H1N1 swine flu, imagining a (at that time hypothetical) situation of New Zealand in lock down. This imagined influenza pandemic scenario became reality in 2020, with the outbreak of Covid-19. Taking on a new relevance the novel rereleased in 2021, as *Locked Down*, with illustrations by Toby Morris.



### About the illustrator

Toby Morris is an award-winning illustrator, comic artist and author of the successful non-fiction comic series *The Side Eye on the Spinoff* and *The Pencilsword* on RNZ.

He has written several children's books including *Capsicum*, *Capsi Go*, *The Day The Costumes Stuck*, *Don't Puke On Your Dad* and the graphic novel *Te Tiriti O Waitangi* and developed artwork for musicians including The Beths, Beastwars, Neil and Liam Finn, Ladyhawke and Phoenix Foundation, and diverse brands including Allbirds, L&P, Good George - even the Edmonds Baking Powder box!



## BEFORE READING

- 1) Throughout this book there are illustrations by Toby Morris. These start before the story.
  - a) What can you see in Morris's first illustration on the front page ?
  - b) What clues does this give us about the story?
- 2) The author Jesse O's dedication reads 'For Finley, Hank and Otis: boys who know about lockdown'. Why do you think this book is dedicated in this way? What do you know about lockdown?
- 3) What can you see on the cover of the book? List three aspects of the cover design that give you clues about the story.
- 4) Read through the contents page. Which chapter or section interests you the most? Explain why.

## Close Reading Questions

- 1) Who is the Minister of Health in this story?
- 2) Who is the narrator of the story?
- 3) What is the music played loudly by Billy Teese in his dad's car?
- 4) What street do the family live on?
- 5) What city do the family live in?
- 6) Who is in the Flint family?
- 7) Why does Zac call his neighbour 'Colonel Mustard'?
- 8) Where did Billy and his dad live just before coming to Hansen?
- 9) What does Zac miss about his dad?
- 10) What is Zac's uncle's name? What does he like to do every year?
- 11) Who is Hansen's Director of Medical Services?
- 12) What is a 'red herring'?
- 13) What does Merv call Colonel Mustard?
- 14) Who is the city coroner?
- 15) What is the reticulation of water?
- 16) What was salt used to preserve in the olden days?
- 17) What is the Blue Journal that Zac finds in the attic?
- 18) What is the title of James Flint's draft book manuscript?
- 19) What does Zac do to the old coal range?
- 20) What happens to Zac's brother Daniel in the reserve?
- 21) How many years did Mrs Lelo and Gerald spend in Africa?
- 22) What percentage of the world's land area does the continent of Africa take up?
- 23) Does Mrs Lelo have children?
- 24) What animal ends up in Mrs Lelo's yard?
- 25) What does Zac discover at the end of the Blue Journal?
- 26) Who leaves the snapper in a parcel in the letterbox for the Flints?
- 27) What will Zac call his book?

## Themes

At the end of the book, Zac talks about what he is writing. He says:

***'It's a story about survival, and the power of people working together. There's a parallel universe where people have to look after each other, and themselves, completely. I guess you could call it a story about magic, couldn't you?'***

This also describes the main theme in *Locked Down* – that when crisis strikes, it is community thinking that will get us through tough times. It is about caring for your neighbours, family and friends. Finally, *Locked Down* looks at the ways we grieve for people we've lost, and the ways we make it through that specific type of tough time.

1) Find examples of these themes in the book, then explain how your example illustrates each idea.

a) When crisis strikes it is community thinking that will get us through

(Here is a quote from the book to help you: *'It's a folk tale, Daniel, from Tanzania, that one of the children told me. It's about the need to share things, like water, when resources are scarce. That way we all have a chance to survive, by helping each other.'* (169)

b) How we care for our neighbours, family and friends

(Here is a quote from the book to help you: *'When Mum sees Mrs T crying, holding the little dog to her chest like an abandoned baby, she rings the hospital straight away.'* (45)

c) The ways we grieve for people we've lost and the ways we make it through death and loss

(Here is a quote from the book to help you: *'I discover a lump in my mattress – it's the Blue Journal. A wave of guilt comes over me. In the last few weeks I have forgotten my Dad, forgotten about the Blue Journal. I crawl back on the bed.'* (185)

## Characters

1) Zac is the narrator and main character in this book.

- a) As you read the book, note down things that are important to Zac. Try to find other characters' words to back up what you are saying.
- b) In chapter five (48) we hear what happened to Zac's father. Later in the book, he finds out more about this. How does this loss affect Zac?
- c) Do you think Zac copes well or badly during lockdown? Explain why/why not.

2) Mum (Kathleen Flint) is also an important character in this book. She is under pressure to be the responsible adult for her children amidst a pandemic.

- a) How do you know Zac's mum is worried about the pandemic? (Initial clues can be found on pages 39 and 40)
- b) As you read or reread the book, make a list of what Zac says about his mum. What kind of mum do you think she is? Find evidence to back up your answer.

3) Even though he has passed on, Dad (James Flint) is an important character in this book.

- a) Why do you think this is?
- b) How does the author Jesse O make sure we can hear James Flint's voice?
- c) Why is that important when considering the character of Zac?

4) Choose one minor character in the book. You can pick from Mrs Lelo, Billy Teese, Uncle Merv, or Daniel. Describe how they deal with crisis in a community. Use evidence to back up your answer.



# Writing Style and Language Activities

## 1) Narrative style and structure

Zac says: *'Reading someone's diary is like eavesdropping on their thoughts. It's a bit scary really, because you never know what you might hear. A mind-reader. Well, not quite. But that would be cool. Mind-reading.'* (92)

In *Locked Down* we are reading Zac's diary, and this 'mind-reading' is a specific point of view used in writing, too!

- 1) **This book is written in first person narrative style.** This allows us to hear the thoughts of a person, who is usually either the main character or another person describing the actions of the main character. Zac is the narrator of *Locked Down*. Find three good examples of first person narration that allows us to hear Zac's important thoughts.
- 2) There are several **text types** used to structure this book, the main being diary form. List the other text types used. (An example to help you: **text boxes** are used to separate factual information you may not know. See page 69 for a text box on 'Reticulation of Water')
- 3) Zac frequently uses **lists**. Why do you think this is? What effect does it have on the reader?

## 2) Descriptive Language

The author uses **similes** and **metaphors** to make the story interesting to read.

Here is a reminder of what these figures of speech do in our writing:

**Metaphor:** a direct comparison; saying one thing **IS** another (for example, 'the chair was **a solid giant**, made to be sturdy and firm').

**Simile:** a comparison that uses like or as (for example, 'the chair was like a giant, made to be sturdy and firm', or 'the chair was as sturdy as a solid giant').

Here are some **similes** from the book:

- a) Sometimes I can hear his little dog barking, **like a door** slapping back and forth in the wind. (21)
- b) Her eyes bulge **like a rabbit's under a spotlight**. (38)
- c) There's still water coming out of the taps, but it's no longer a reliable flow, and coughs in fits and starts **like an old engine**. (179)

Find **three** other **similes** from the book. Explain why these comparisons have been chosen by the author.

### 3) Vocabulary

Do you know these words?

- 1) manoeuvres
- 2) paediatrics
- 3) apparatus
- 4) emigrated
- 5) badgering
- 6) provincial
- 7) immunity
- 8) nocturnal
- 9) apprehend
- 10) momentum
- 11) documentation
- 12) dehydrated
- 13) malnutrition
- 14) annotated
- 15) dexterity
- 16) torrent
- 17) podocarps
- 18) aneurysm
- 19) dishevelled
- 20) embargoed

1) Choose 10 words from the list. Look them up in a dictionary and write down their meanings.

2) Write a paragraph using five of these words. Share this with a classmate.



## Illustrations

- 1) Look at the map of the neighbourhood, as visualised by Toby Morris. What catches your attention? Why?
- 2) On page 43 Morris has drawn Cindy, Mr Strongman's Jack Russell. How does he show that Cindy is whining or barking?
- 3) Choose your favourite illustration from the book.
  - a) Why do you like this picture?
  - b) What is happening in the picture?
  - c) Why is this illustration important to the story?

## AFTER READING

### Further Research and Creative Activities

- 1) Zac describes Colonel Mustard as looking like Napoleon (22). Research who Napoleon is. Present as a poster or Powerpoint for your class.
- 2) Zac plays board games for three days with Daniel – they call this a 'gameathon' (24). Design a game for lockdown. (We have all now had experience of lockdown; you may have already attempted this task!)
- 3) Zac mentions the 'trees who are watching me: kahikatea, mataī, young tōtara, black beech, māhoe and kānuka' (155). Choose three of these native trees to compare and contrast. Present as a poster or powerpoint.
- 4) Zac notes that 'The Black Death Plague killed nearly a third of all people in parts of Europe in the 1300s, and that was more than four million people, just in England, so I guess the cold didn't stop it.' (208) Make a short film using school equipment or a phone about the plague in the 1300s. Try to incorporate facts as well as dramatic enactments.

5) When this book was first written, Jesse O used these texts for re-search:

*The Hare and the Water*, by Gary Port, Morogoro (Mzumbe) Tanzania.

*Peace Corps/World Wise Schools:*

[www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/hare-and-waterBushcraft](http://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/hare-and-waterBushcraft)

*Outdoor Skills for the New Zealand Bush, Mountain Safety Manual*,  
New Zealand Mountain Safety Council Inc. 2000

*New Zealand Influenza Pandemic Action Plan*,  
Ministry of Health, Sept 2006

Find one of these texts and read it. Make a presentation to the class explaining the links between *Locked Down* and your chosen text.

6) Brainstorm a list of the most fantastic and the most awful aspects of being locked down. Can you turn this into a monologue for performance? Write, practise and perform for your class.

7) Toby Morris was an important communicator alongside microbiologist Siouxsie Wiles during the 2020 COVID pandemic lockdown in New Zealand. Their work was presented on the newsite The Spinoff throughout 2020. Visit The Spinoff and choose your favourite of their animations about COVID-19. Present it to the class, explaining why. Then choose a moment in the book *Locked Down* and draw your own graphic communicating important information.