

Teacher's Notes

In Lonnie's Shadow **Chrissie Michaels**

About the novel

In Lonnie's Shadow is a novel set in Melbourne in 1891. It was inspired by several archaeological digs in the old Little Lon district in the inner city and the subsequent display of artefacts in Museum Victoria. The objects seemed to tell their own stories.

Little Lon was known in the 19th century for its vice and criminality. The digs however uncovered something not fully understood before about this area. The items that were found suggested that it had a real community of ordinary working families and had been settled by a range of newly arrived immigrants.

The chapter headings are based on objects that came (or could have come) from the digs. The story focuses on a group of teenagers living in Little Lon in the 1890s. The object named in each chapter heading has a role in the episode that follows.

The four principle teenagers, Lonnie, Pearl, Daisy and Carlo are trying to make a fair go of things. Each of the characters has to deal with difficulties in their respective journeys. Sometimes it's hard to know whom they can rely upon, secrets are kept and promises made. The characters find themselves facing many dangerous situations – theft and kidnap, gang warfare and murder – and they have to make some pretty serious choices.

And, of course, there will be consequences.

About the author

History fires up Chrissie. She loves to research people and places and use them as a starting point for her stories.

Asked why she writes, she answers:

'Why do I write? Why do I garden? Why do I walk? I guess it's just part of what I like to do. I'm a person who lives a lot in my head; although having said that, I'm a bit of chatterbox at times ... so I'm told.'

Her published work includes children's fiction, poetry, short stories for adults and children, as well as primary school texts for English teachers. She also worked as a writing consultant for Museum Victoria's *One, Two, Three Grow* (2000) which continues today as a children's exhibition in the Big Box.

Chrissie teaches part-time in a country school in Victoria. Every time she takes her class out to one of the local beaches for some coastal geography they all agree it's the best classroom in the world!

Visit her website at: <http://sites.google.com/site/chrissiemichaelsorg>

READING AND RESPONDING

Characters

Questions

1. How old is Lonnie?
2. What does he steal at the beginning of the story? Why?
3. Why does Pearl leave Annie's house?
4. Why does Pearl miss her meeting with Lonnie at the oyster bar?
5. What is Daisy's job?
6. Why is Daisy treated kindly by Madam Buckingham?
7. How did Pearl once get Carlo into trouble?
8. Who are the following?
 - A) Biddy
 - B) Annie Walker
 - C) Madam Buckingham
 - D) Thomas Crick
 - E) Henry Payne
 - F) Rose Payne
 - G) Ruby
 - H) Tilly Palmer
 - I) Slasher Jack
 - J) Ron Alcock
9. Name the two gangs and their leaders.
10. Name the two main horses that figure in the story.

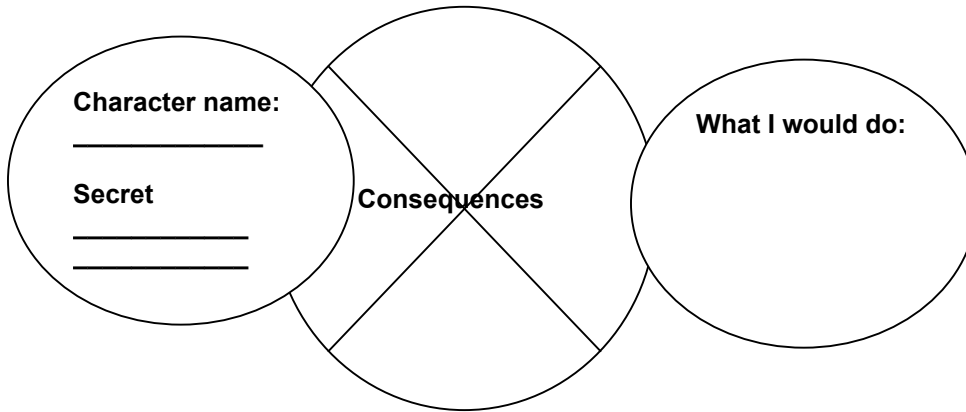
Activity #1

A character in a story is revealed to us in many ways.
Fill in the table below to show what we learn about the four teenage
characters in the novel *In Lonnie's Shadow*:

| | What they say | What they do | How they relate to others | What others say about them | What the author says |
|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Lonnie | | | | | |
| Pearl | | | | | |
| Daisy | | | | | |
| Carlo | | | | | |

Activity #2

Quite a few of the characters in the novel keep or tell a secret. This action has consequences for themselves and for others. Draw a diagram like the one below to describe a character's secret. In pairs fill in up to four possible consequences. Decide what you would do in the same situation.



Setting

Questions

- What do the front and back covers suggest about where the story is set?
 - What place acts as the main setting for the novel?
 - Describe five features of this place.
 - What clues in the novel reveal the time period?
 - How do the chapter headings reveal the setting?
- What elements of characterisation and setting give the reader a sense of 1891 Little Lon as:
 - A) the underbelly of Melbourne
 - B) a caring community?

Activity #1

Download or trace a map of the inner city of Melbourne. Label the various settings in the novel. Be sure to include:

Little Lon

The route of the illegal horse race

The Exhibition Building

Carlton

The Eastern Market (a tricky one!)

The Royal and Block Arcades

Collins Street

Any others?

Activity # 2

Read through the following chapters and then select the words and phrases which give a sense about the time and place in which the story is set.

- **Alabaster figurine** pp 27 - 36
- **Leather strap** pp 43 - 46
- **Fragment of washbowl** pp 145 -147
- **Woollen sock** pp 206 -208

**Looking at Melbourne
1891**

Answer True or False:

- ___ Melbournians were once known to have illegally raced horses (and pigs) through the streets of their town.
- ___ 'Doing the block' meant getting dressed up and parading around Collins Street and the neighbouring arcades.
- ___ Coles' Book Arcade was home to over 3 million books and had a monkey house and fernery.
- ___ When it was built, the Australian Building was said to be the tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere.
- ___ People used to buy take-away oysters for a treat from places known as Oyster bars.
- ___ A skittle saloon is an old fashioned name for a bowling alley.
- ___ The Eastern Market was a big market on the modern day site of the Victoria Market.
- ___ The Royal Arcade and the Block Arcade still exist in 21st Century Melbourne.
- ___ Frederick McCubbin was a famous Australian artist.
- ___ The Push and The Glass and Bottle gangs really existed.

True or False Quiz:

The Eastern Market ...
is the **only False** statement here.

Setting

Advanced Activity

Imagining landscape - reinventing Little Lon

Read the following passage. Use the box-out questions as a springboard for further research and discussion.

We all do it at one time or another, give voice to a sense of homeliness to the area where we grew up. When asked, 'Where do you live?' we answer 'Brissie', or 'Dandy', or 'The Pines'. Naming the place colloquially is a way of determining our sense of territory, our sense of belonging.

Originally Little Lon was such a place, an idiom naming the people who lived in the Melbourne block of laneways and alleys bordered by Spring Street (east), Exhibition Street (west), La Trobe Street (north) and Lonsdale Street (to the south). To put it simply, Little Lon was the vernacular for where they came from.

By the 1890s the place had already been settled for nearly 50 years, moving from weatherboard dwellings of two rooms to stone and brick houses and shops; then to residences for the newly arrived immigrants_a multicultural community of Italians and Syrians, Chinese and the Irish_who lived alongside the commercial properties: the furniture makers, ice cream vendors and the prostitutes.

Little Lon, this homeland, this place for workers and families who settled here from all parts of the globe, somehow became notorious. Living conditions were regarded by many Melbournians as primitive, unsanitary, poverty stricken, and we can only imagine, at times barbaric. This was in part because of much sensationalised coverage from the media, but there is no doubt some of this was grounded in truth. Subsequently the tag, Little Lon, settled into the public consciousness as the place of Melbourne's underbelly, the core of slumdom. By the time CJ Dennis centred his sentimental bloke there, it was regarded only as a place for 'low degraded broods' where roughs 'deals it out wiv bricks and boots'. Hence as an orchestrated construct, Little Lon became the dividing line between the mainstream homeland and the foreign, shadowy badland where thugs ran rampant.

The view became fixed. Little Lon was the unofficial name for Melbourne's depraved slums. It is not surprising that mission workers penetrated the place with zeal in order to rescue the neglected and the fallen. Mother Mary McKillop, who has recently been canonized a saint by the Catholic church, set up a mission there in 1891. The Salvation Army ran Hope Hall. Selina Sutherland did extraordinary work to help children.

Describe how the characters in the novel reflect this multicultural landscape.

- What were the main aims of these mission workers and rescue brigades?
- What parallels to today's charitable organisations can you make?

By the 1950s the workplaces had shut down and the immigrant communities had moved onwards (and upwards). Little Lon vanished as a community, cleared or built over, well nigh erased from existence, other than for a few remaining buildings. Some of these are still under the threat of demolition, such as the Little Lon terraces set to be replaced by a 30-storey apartment tower. It looks as though soon we will have no choice but to relegate Little Lon further into the recesses of our imagination.

Detonate or renovate!
Investigate recent heritage debates in your region. If you live in Australia start with the National Trust or Heritage web

However the modern view of Little Lon has shifted from this earlier perception. Several archaeological digs, with up to 500 000 artefacts discovered (and a wonderful exhibition at Museum Victoria) have helped us to better understand the diversity of this community. It was a place where, yes, conditions were hard, but families made homes there, carved dolls out of wood for their children, boiled down animal bones so the children could play a game of Jacks or knucklebones. People lived, worked, ran businesses, partied, had dreams, made plans for the future.

Describe how the characters in the novel reflect this multicultural landscape.

Research Museum Victoria's website to find out more about the Little Lon collection.

Choose an object from the museum collection and use it as a starting point for a piece of imaginative writing.

In the 21st Century we remember Little Lon as a place where the conditions were harsh, but we cannot, nor should we forget that for the people who lived there Little Lon was indeed home. Some were part of family, a part of a community. Maybe they they never considered themselves as being any different from anyone else, or that they were underprivileged or deprived.

We can only hope that this place of shadows in the heart of our city had some sunlight after all.

What is the significance of the novel's title? Describe how it refers to more than just a 'place of shadows'.

Themes

Although the novel is set in the past, there are still many issues in the novel which concern us today.

Using the headings below to reflect on some of these issues:

Give an example from the novel and a modern day example.

State current views, i.e. how society is trying to deal with the issue. As well, state your personal viewpoint.

| Issue: <i>In Lonnie's Shadow</i> | Modern day Society's views | My opinion - |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| E.G. | E.G | |

Binge-drinking

Illegal street racing

Safety on our streets

Living in a multicultural society

Government and charitable intervention programs

Abortion

Prostitution

Teen sex

Suicide

Creating and Exploring

Look at the book trailer for *In Lonnie's Shadow* on Chrissie's website:
<http://sites.google.com/site/chrissiemichaelsorg>
then use Windows MovieMaker program (on most computers these days)
to create your own 1 - 2 minute book trailer for *Lonnie*.

Write a Point of View essay on one of the issues above.

Write a Letter to the Editor arguing why old buildings and neighbourhoods
need to be saved for the future.

Write a short story based on an object that has some significance for you.

Lonnie falls in and out of love, first with Rose, then with Pearl. Write a
poem to express the highs and lows of first love.

Write a script based on one of the chapters (or a section of the chapter)
and perform it for your classmates.

Research your own neighbourhood. What did it look like in the 1890s?
Who lived there? What has changed? What hasn't?

Visit a historic district in your town or city and imagine a person who might
have lived there in the past. Write a story about that person ensuring that
you use plenty of detail to evoke the setting.

Write a review of *In Lonnie's Shadow* and post it up somewhere in your
classroom. Read your classmates' reviews.