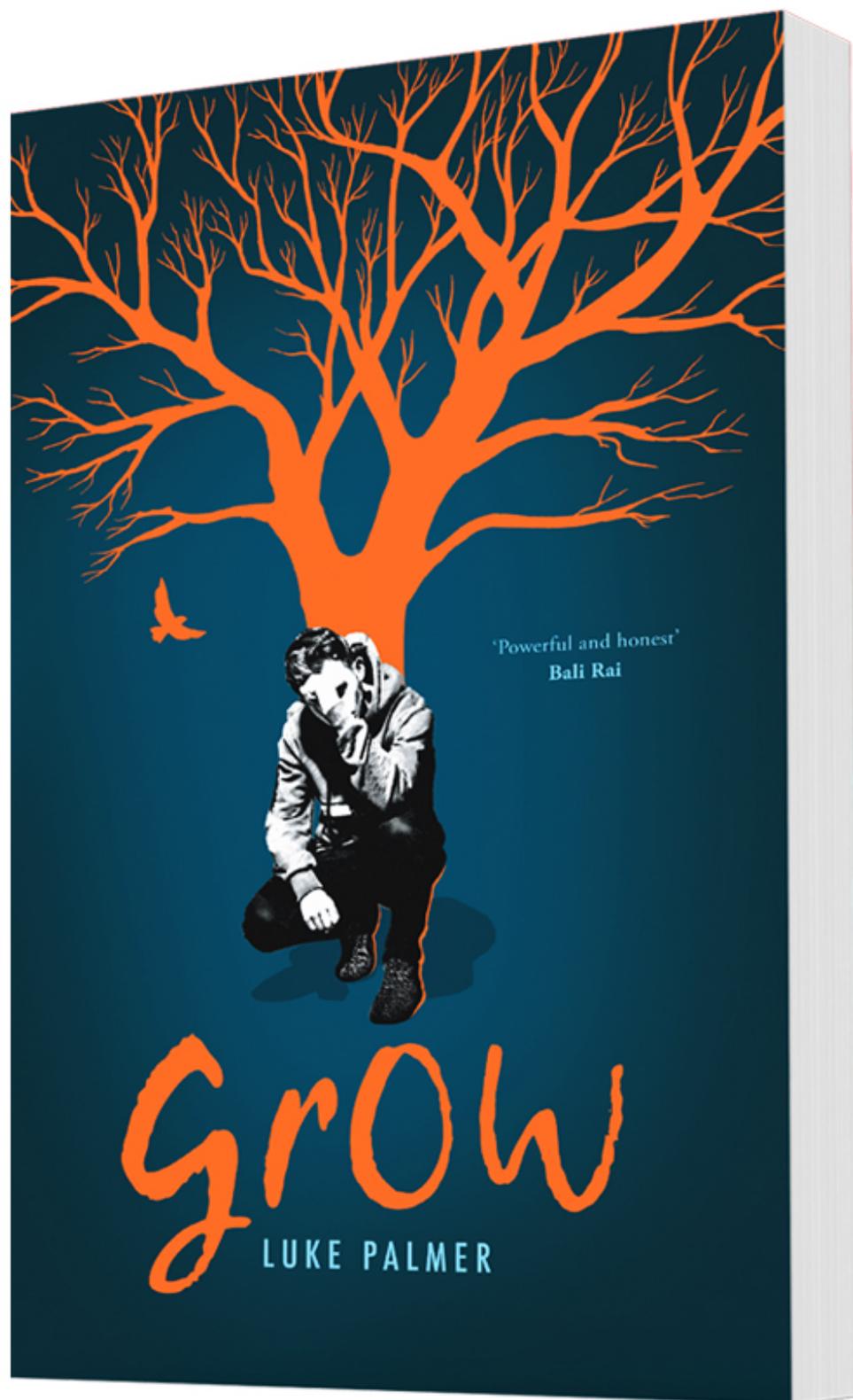


Grow - Discussion Notes



Chapters 1 - 5

'I've passed the age when it's OK for your mum to see you in your pants.' What kind of relationship is established between Josh and his Mother in the opening of the book? It often seems that there is something unspoken happening between them. What do you think they would want to say to each other, and why are they finding it so difficult to talk. Is it only because of what has happened to Josh's dad?

'I stopped reading books about the end of the world, and all the adults dying.' Josh used to really enjoy dystopian fiction, and would often cast himself as a 'survivor' in those kinds of books. Have you ever imagined yourself in a particular type of book, or film? What would be the *worst* genre of story for you to end up in? In what ways do you think Josh has been 'cast' in the story of his own life at this point, and how do you think he has reacted to the role he's been given?

'Every week it's the same number of bags, the same things in each one.' Josh's life seems to follow a predictable routine. What would be the comforts of following a routine for Josh and his mother? What problems do you think this might throw up later?

Chapters 6 - 10

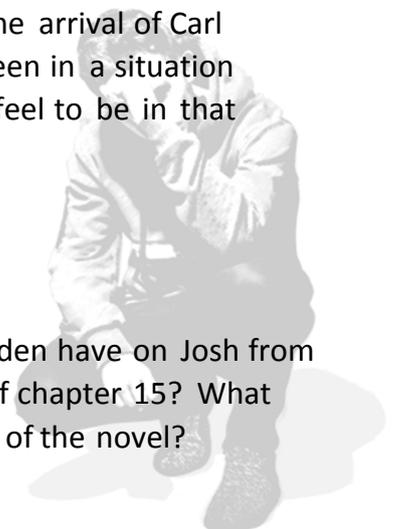
'That way, people don't notice you sitting on your own'. What is school like for Josh? Are schools good places for people marked as 'different' in some way? What are your thoughts on Mr Walters's attempts to support Josh at this point? How do they make Josh feel?

'But tonight, I'm singing and laughing and jumping too.' Did Josh make the right decision in going to Jamie's Party? Why do you think he takes the beer with him? Was it the right thing to do?

'Everything around him seems to shrink back as he passes.' The arrival of Carl changes the mood of the party dramatically. Have you ever been in a situation where one person or action has had this effect? How does it feel to be in that situation?

Chapter 11-16

'Intricate ropes of tiny, furry stars'. What impact does the garden have on Josh from the start, and how does he feel to be back there at the end of chapter 15? What are the clues that this might be an important place in the rest of the novel?



'Hard faces. Closed faces.' In what ways is Josh out of his comfort zone when he first meets Alan and Vince? How would you react in that situation? The conversations in the afterschool session quickly turn towards difficult topics, both with and without the presence of a teacher. How do you tend to react when those kind of conversations are going on? Who do you listen to?

'She loops her arm through mine and starts to march me up the road.' In what ways do you think Dana is a good influence on Josh, and to what extent does Josh allow himself to be led by her?

Chapters 17 - 21



'His half-smile, his gritted-teeth, angry grin.' Why does Josh open Alan's email? What do you think he's looking for? What questions does it raise for Josh?

'I just don't want people thinking I'm hanging out with ... a terrorist.' What's your reaction to Jamie's reluctance to be Ahmed's 'buddy'? How is where you live different to Josh's town? What does 'Englishness' mean to you?

'Her words are lying there, heavy and broken.' Why can't Josh offer Dana the help that she is clearly asking for? Do you blame him for this? At this point in the novel, to what extent is Josh a good person?

Chapters 22 - 26

'A few drops of my hot, angry tears.[...] What will he do with those?' When Josh visits his father's grave, what emotions is he carrying with him? Try recording these in a visual way. Can you find a way of showing how strongly each emotion and feeling is influencing him?

'Whatever I may be at the moment, Josh, I'm still your mother.' In what ways have your feelings about Josh's relationship with his mum changed since the start of the book? Are they closer now or further apart than they were in chapter one? What do you think Josh's mum gets from going to see her parents, and how does this experience of relative normality affect Josh?

'So I'd plant the seeds now?' What do you think of Josh's decision to start growing things for next year? Why is it significant that it comes at this point in the novel? What do you think is motivating Josh when he asks for his Grandad's help with this?

Chapter 27 - 33

'Do you wish to continue? I click 'yes'.' What are the different influences on your world view, or your opinion about events on a local, national or international scale? Do you know if you can trust these influences, and to what extent is this 'trust' a choice that we make consciously? How are the sources that Josh finds in chapter 27 designed to have a powerful effect on him?

[Here are some further resources](#) on critical thinking online, produced by Childnet.

'I feel his fingers curl into my shoulder blades.' In Josh's second encounter with Carl, to what extent does Carl's treatment of him feel even more threatening than at the party?

'Once you let the enemy in, it's almost impossible to get rid of them'. Who and what are Josh's enemies at this point? Would Josh agree with you? To what extent are these enemies now under Josh's skin, and how might he be able to battle them? To go further, do you think that 'war' is a good metaphor to use when discussing culture, or ideas? What might be a better one?

Here's a link to a fantastic resource produced by HOPE not Hate about challenging hate in your community. <https://charity.hopenothate.org.uk/14-steps-to-challenge-hate>

Chapter 34 - 39

'You have no idea what you're finding, Josh.' Josh's behaviour in these chapters is very different to the start of the book. What does he appear to enjoy about his new persona, and to what extent do you find it convincing? Are there any other characters who appear to be putting on an act, and for what reasons?

'I belch out great clouds of black smoke.' Does Josh know what he is becoming at this point? To what extent do you think Josh is in control of his situation? Is it too late for him to reverse some of his decisions, and what would be the consequences of doing that?

'Someone lets go of the rope that was holding me.' Josh is offered help by Dana and Jamie in these chapters, but he turns them both down. Have you ever been in a situation when you know you should accept help or take advice, but have felt unable to do so? Did the situation turn out badly as a result, and how did this make you feel?

Chapter 40 - 45

'And then I'm fully awake, the black square lifted.' To what extent could Jamie's injury be considered the turning point of the book? Who is more hurt by the accident; Jamie or Josh? In what ways is Josh's reaction to the accident understandable, or forgivable?

'Like a bucket being pulled from a deep well.' What do you think Josh is experiencing here?

'Mum takes the batteries out of the smoke alarm.' Once again, there has been a change in the relationship between Josh and his mum. There's perhaps even more between them that is unspoken. What advice would you offer to Josh and his mother at this point? You could write a pair of letters, or devise a piece of dialogue in which both characters tell the other what they want. How would each character respond to the other's requests? What conclusions can you draw about why so much remains unsaid between them?

Chapter 46 - 49

'Ahmed flashes me a smile.' Watching their friends play football is the first time that Josh and Ahmed have had a proper encounter. Up until this point, what has Josh used to form an opinion of Ahmed? Has it changed as a result of this episode?

'The whole thing takes less than ten seconds.' Is Josh's role in the destruction of the shop any different to his earlier activities with the Lions? Does this make a difference to that way we react to them, or to him?

'There's only so much shame I can live with.' To what extent does Josh have our sympathy by the end of chapter 49? Do you think he should have told his mum everything, and why do you think he held back? Are there any events or moments in your past that you avoid talking about because of shame? What about the communities and culture that we live in - is 'shame' something that can be felt communally, and how does it stop us from talking about things?

Chapters 50 - 55

'A strange warmth and comfort.' What are the sources that Josh draws from to re-find himself in these chapters? Can you find a way to represent these visually, much like your visual representation of the 'bad' influences on Josh in chapters 22 - 26? Which factors - the 'good' or the 'bad' - are having the most influence over Josh at the moment?

'The wound opening up a little.' At this stage of the story, Josh carries the scars - physically and mentally - of his earlier experiences. To what extent are they helpful to him now? Are there any events in your life that have taught you something or changed the way you act in certain situations and circumstances? Are 'good' or 'bad' events best at teaching us lessons about ourselves?

Chapters 56 - 60

'I want to show you something.' Why does Josh open up to Ahmed at this point? What motivates his decision to do so? In what ways can Josh relate to Ahmed in a way that he can't to any of the other characters?

'I try to summon up the old fire. It will have to be enough just to act it.' Why do you think Josh is suddenly able to be the strength that Dana needs, and to stand up to Carl? What does it take for him to act in this way? Can we use words like 'brave' and 'courageous' to describe Josh at this point? Would it have taken more bravery to walk away from Carl and Alan at an earlier point?

'I think Dana's relaxed. Maybe even happy.' What kind of a journey has Dana been on up to this point? If this were Dana's story, how would she describe Josh at this point?

Chapters 61- 65



'I don't want Carl thinking badly of me.' Dan is an interesting background character in the book. Why do you think he was drawn into Carl's ideologies, and what do you think of his resistance to them? How does Josh view Dan, and how do you think Dan views Josh? As an adult, do you think Dan is more to blame for the situation at this point in the novel?

'You're *playing* with us! You could have stepped in at any time!' Do you agree with Dana here? In what ways could the police response to the White Lions have been better? Using a summary of UK laws like the one below, what powers would you give to police and other agencies to avoid situations like Josh and Dana's from happening?

<https://www.theweek.co.uk/97552/hate-speech-vs-free-speech-the-uk-laws>

'Martin.' Did you see this twist coming? If so, what were the clues? How did Martin/Mr Walters manage to influence Josh, and how did it manage to go unnoticed?

Chapter 66 - 67

'You don't just throw yourself into the mouth of these things.' Despite everything that's happened in the last few chapters, Josh is drawn back in to the finale of the book. Why is he unable to stop himself here? It seems like Josh is inside one of the books he used to enjoy so much, but what details make the reality of this climax impossible to ignore?

'The daffodils that I planted are dancing.' To what extent are the well and the garden used throughout the novel, and how does their appearance at the end of the book relate to their earlier symbolism?

'We watch its dip and rise, buffeted in the wake of the passing traffic.' Do you think Dana and Josh should have kept looking after the garden? Are you satisfied by the way the events and relationships in the book are resolved? In what ways do you think this is a suitable final line, and final chapter, for the book?

After reading.

There are many factors that lead to Josh's involvement with a far-right hate group. One of these is the information he finds online.

In their recent 'A Better Web' report, HOPE not Hate said:

"At present, online speech which causes division and harm is often defended on the basis that to remove it would undermine free speech. However, in reality, allowing such speech to be disseminated only erodes the quality of public debate, and causes harms to the groups such speech targets. This defence, in theory and in practice, minimises free speech overall."

What are your thoughts on freedom of speech online? When does free speech tip over into hate speech, and how should hate speech be moderated and punished? Can you devise a set of principles that you could use, and adhere to, that would help make a better web for member of your school community, or your wider community?

There are several organisations who can offer support for the various issues raised in this book. This list is a by-no-means-exhaustive starting point.

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/> - A dedicated group using research, education and public engagement to provide a positive antidote to the politics of hate.

<https://tellmamauk.org/> - Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks is a secure and reliable service that allows people across the UK to report any form of Anti-Muslim abuse.

<https://www.stophateuk.org/> - A UK organisation working to challenge all forms of hate crimes and discrimination.

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/> - The UK's leading race equality think tank.

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en> - An independent UK public body that aims to be a centre of excellence for evidence, analysis and equality and human rights law.

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/equality/resources/race-equality/how-to-be-a-white-ally/> - There are many resources on allyship and active anti-racism. This one from Imperial College London provides many links to further organisations.

