

TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

Longacre Press NZ Young Adult Fiction

About Griffen's Heart

Tina Shaw

'A story with heart-appeal'

*One day you're playing soccer with your mates.
Next, you're pretty much an invalid. One day
there's a school tramp in the Port Hills, next it
takes all your energy just to get to school.*

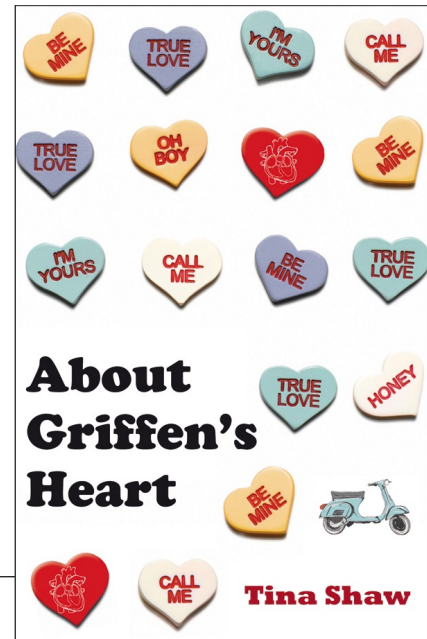
James Griffen is not the bravest guy around.
That's not surprising – he's on the waiting list
for open heart surgery, and scared witless.

Mostly he putters about on his Vespa and
hangs out at the local video store.

His rebel brother Ryan, whose motto is never
going to be 'safety first', needs some sorting
out, but James can't get that right either.

Then James meets the gorgeous Roxy and
all caution goes to the wind – in spite of the
thrashing to his heart.

A smart, nifty story with both tender and
tough moments, and real heart-appeal.



SPECIFICATIONS:

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RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

**Language questions
character questions, and
creative responses.**

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Saul Osborne

Author Tina Shaw writes:

About Griffen's Heart was inspired by the true story of a young man with a bad heart who did something very brave. Although James is a bit of a wimp in many respects, he is also capable of acting selflessly, and that was something I wanted to capture in this novel.

Language:

1. What do you think the genre of this book might be? List the aspects that are indicative of this genre.
2. James makes a pun (p. 9). Think of three examples of puns – and the context in which they would work.
3. Figurative language is used to convey ideas that might otherwise be difficult to express. Two examples of figurative language are metaphors and similes. For example, ‘... she of the corrugated iron hair and razor wit.’ (p. 9) and, ‘Her creamy voice slid like a little worm into my ear.’ (p. 56). Find more examples of each type of figurative language from the book.
4. What does the word ‘vespa’ mean in Italian (p. 36)? Find out how to say this word in six other foreign languages.
5. The author uses symbolism in the book. What might the following symbolise: blood is thicker than water (p. 42) and a chip on his shoulder (p. 129)? Think of three other examples of symbolism.
6. The author often uses animal imagery. For example, Ryan is like an ape (p. 19) and James compares himself to a sloth (p. 76). Find one more example of animal imagery in the book. Write a simile using each of the following animals:
 - elephant
 - kiwi
 - peacock
 - puppy
 - monkey
7. James lists some common sayings about the heart. For example, ‘... a heart of gold, in your heart of hearts ...’ etc (p. 60). Can you think of any others?
8. When James gets down from the tree, he is relieved to be on ‘terra firma’ (p. 76). What does this mean? What language is this? Research this language and find three more phrases from it that are used in English.
9. James refers to the figure of speech – euphemism (p. 152). Write down three examples of euphemisms.
10. Find the definitions for the following words which are taken from the novel and write one sentence for each:
 - mollify (p. 23)
 - berating (p. 33)
 - insinuated (p. 56)
 - wily (p. 64)

- inscrutable (p. 67)
- sardonic (p. 72)
- balefully (p. 85)
- dilapidated (p. 88)
- brusquely (p. 102)
- macabre (p. 105)
- hoary (p. 139)

Characters:

1. Think of three adjectives to describe James.
2. Write a character summary of one of the following characters:
 - James
 - Ryan
 - James's mum
 - Leo
 - Roxy
3. Draw a picture of one of the characters based on their physical descriptions. For example, Roxy (pp. 10–12) and Tharg (p. 37).
4. What effect does James's heart condition have on the immediate members of his family? Do their attitudes towards James change after his operation?
5. What does the novel say about friendships and/or family and their importance during difficult times. List examples of episodes when friends and/or family have been either a help or hindrance to James and/or Roxy.
6. James compares those around him to actors and/or fictional characters. Who does he compare Maureen (p. 54) and his mum (p. 81) to? Who would you compare James to?
7. James notes the stereotypes that people in his school fall into. Which characters from the novel do you think fall into the following stereotypes:
 - jocks
 - nerds
 - dorks
 - hot chicks (p. 26)

8. Which character do you think changes and develops the most by the end of the novel?
9. Compare Roxy, Ryan and James's reaction to the incident with Leo (pp. 141–143).

Creative Responses:

1. List what you think are the central themes of the novel.
2. In which New Zealand city is the novel set? Find three references from the novel to support your answer.
3. James has had rheumatic fever. Research and write a report about this condition (p. 8).
4. James is on a waiting list for his surgery (p. 8). How do New Zealand's public hospital waiting lists work? What are the advantages/disadvantages of this system?
5. Mr Digby, James's English teacher, is nicknamed 'Chaucer' (p. 9). Find out who Chaucer was and write an author study on him.
6. James is studying the play *Twelfth Night* in English (p. 10). Who wrote this play? Write a plot and character summary of the play.
7. James often thinks about the question 'If you had six months left to live what would you do?' (p. 14). How would you answer this question?
8. James's hero is Clint Eastwood (p. 14). Which films has he been in? What roles is he most famous for? Why do you think he's James's hero?
9. Throughout the novel James refers to a variety of films. Find and list all the references in the novel and divide them into genres. For example, Westerns, romantic comedies etc.
10. Choose one of the films James mentions in the novel. Watch your chosen film and write a review of it to share with your class.

11. Roxy is blasting Soundgarden (p. 21), James's Mum listens to Simon and Garfunkel (p. 62) and James recognizes a song by Cole Porter (p. 93). Choose one of these bands or musicians, research them and then present your findings to your class.
12. Ajax's sister plays the oboe (p. 58). What type of instrument is this? What other instruments are in the same category as the oboe? Draw a diagram of an orchestra. In which section would the oboe be found?
13. Ryan agrees to talk to Roxy if James buys him a bottle of bourbon (p. 30). What are the drinking laws in New Zealand? How do they compare with those of other countries?
14. James's driving licence says he's 18 (p. 30). Write down the process of obtaining a driver's licence in New Zealand.
15. Roxy lives next to a bush reserve in which toi-toi grows (pp. 20–21). Is there a bush reserve where you live? What plants are in it? Do you think it is important for a city or town to have a reserve and why? List some more New Zealand native plants.
16. James knows very little about his family history (p. 36). Research your family history and draw a family tree diagram going back a few generations. Write a brief description about each family member next to their name on the diagram.
17. James has seen a photograph of his father in front of Ayers Rock (p. 36). Where is this rock? What is its Aboriginal name? What is the significance of this land form for the Aboriginal people? Find a similar example of a place that has significance for Maori in New Zealand.
18. James describes his heart pounding like the 'drums of Mordor' (p. 38). Which popular trilogy is this reference from? Who wrote the trilogy and when?
19. James says his heart sounds like a 'metronome' (p. 147). What is this?
20. James says when his Mum talks about Australia it sounds like 'the outermost reaches of Siberia' (p. 40). Find Siberia on a map. How far is it from New Zealand?
21. James wishes he could leave school and get a job cleaning swimming pools 'like the guys in Malibu.' (p. 100). Where is Malibu? Locate it on a map.
22. Snowboarding and paragliding are two sports James cannot participate in because of his heart condition (p. 41). What other extreme sports would be dangerous for him to take part in?
23. James wishes he could go bungee jumping (p. 107). Who invented the modern day bungee jump? Where did the idea originate?
24. James comments that Roxy has a 'personal male harem' (p. 52). What does this mean? Where does the word 'harem' originate? What other historical figures had harems?
25. When he hears Roxy's voice on the phone James is hit by sudden vertigo (p. 56). What phobia is this? List ten other phobias and their definitions?
26. Draw and label a diagram of how the human heart works (p. 61).
27. What is the process of open-heart surgery (p. 144)?
28. James describes how the heart works (p. 61). Choose another vital organ in the human body and describe how it works.
29. Dr Brad is always talking about genetics (p. 39). Research one other disease that is genetic?
30. In the novel James mentions other diseases such as smallpox (p. 67) and the bubonic plague (p. 146). When did people suffer from these diseases? Are they still around today?

31. James mentions a rare medical condition where people age three times faster than normal (p. 139). Using the internet find out the scientific name of this disease.
32. James says that he feels like a zombie (p. 61). Research the history of zombies. What stories or legends have been told about them?
33. Roxy tells James he should start a 'new Nazi party' with her father (p. 77). What is she implying by this?
34. James's mum reads self-help books (p. 79). He thinks they are a waste of time. Do you agree / disagree?
35. Ryan has to attend anger management classes (p. 160). What support agencies exist in New Zealand to help people with anger management? Does your school offer anger management classes?
36. James's mum often relays 'alcohol and speed' stories to James and Ryan (p. 80). What are the laws about drink-driving in New Zealand. Create a new anti drink-driving advertising campaign aimed at teenage drivers.
37. Roxy mentions that James's surname comes from a mythical creature (p. 83). Research the origin of this mythical creature and draw a picture of it.
38. Leo is making a model of the QE2 (p. 66). Research this ship.
39. James tells Roxy he would write a love poem for a girl. Study the genre of the love poem and then compose a love poem from James to Roxy (p. 90).
40. James and Roxy discuss the notion of life after death (p. 122). Choose four different religions and/or cultures from the East and West. Research, compare and contrast their beliefs about what happens when you die.
41. Choose one of the descriptive passages in the novel which you find particularly effective and use it to set the scene or the mood for your own passage. Quote the passage as the epigraph for your work (i.e. clearly state the source: title, author, publisher, date, chapter, page number).
42. Write a diary entry about one of the main events in the book by one of the following characters:
 - James's mum
 - Leo
 - Roxy
 - Maureen
43. Write a monologue from Ryan's point of view about his family.
44. Rewrite one of the climactic scenes as a video script. (If your school has filming equipment, produce your scene).
45. Design your own cover for the novel.
46. Do you think the novel would make a good film or TV programme? Write a letter in support of the film for possible investors and design a poster advertising the movie/TV version of the novel. Think about which actors you would like to use to portray the book's characters and why.
47. Devise a soundtrack for the film version of the novel. Choose at least five tracks to give the flavour of the characters, pace and settings. Explain your choices and how they reflect the themes in the novel.
48. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine or newspaper.
49. Write your own version of the back cover blurb.