



WHAT DOES THE BLUE FEEL LIKE?

Jessica Davidson

Teachers' Notes

* This set of teachers' notes provides a framework for study of "WHAT DOES BLUE FEEL LIKE?".

* The notes are broken into exercises and questions under the headings:

- Examining Textual features
- Keeping Track
- Discussing the Themes

* Teachers should be encouraged to springboard from the suggestions into further work that the class will identify with and enjoy. Teachers should feel comfortable to simplify, modify and extend any activities to suit the needs and interests of their class.

Synopsis

Char is seventeen. She's in her last year of school. She's in a mess. She can't sleep, she can't eat. She feels...nothing.

We follow the story of Char's final year as she swings in and out of depression. We meet the important people in her life and hear their stories. We watch her slowly steer her life back on track.

WHAT DOES BLUE FEEL LIKE is a confronting, challenging and realistic portrayal of a young girl who is on the edge.

Examining the Textual Features

Verse Novel

1. What is a verse novel?
2. Did you enjoy reading this novel?
3. As a class, compare the textual features of a verse novel with a traditional novel:

Traditional Novel:	Verse Novel

Perspectives

1. Discuss the effect of the author's switching between first and third person narratives.
2. Discuss the effect of hearing many different 'voices' in the novel.
3. Write your own personal narrative which switches between voices and narratives.



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Similes

* A simile is when something is described as being something else using the words like or as.

1. Identify the similes used in *Bronwyn/Sand* pg 6
2. What does the simile mean? What is the effect? Is it effective in creating imagery?

*Except for recently, when Char is like
The outgoing current,
Drifting, pulling, sliding away.*

Sometimes Bronwyn is the sand.

1. Identify the similes used in *Oasis* pg 17
2. What do the similes mean? What is the effect? Are they effective in creating imagery?

Imagery

1. Discuss the imagery of *Char's pillows* (pg 7)

* Another technique used in WHAT DOES BLUE FEEL LIKE? is *personification*

1. Look up the definition of personification.



* Identify the personification in the following and discuss the imagery that each creates in your mind:

1. *Nothingness – A lonely companion to have*
2. *The pleats sag limply in the breeze
They seem almost sad*
3. *The Knives in our kitchen mock me*

* Re-read *Like a Fog* (pg 38)

1. Is this effective imagery? Why? Why not?

* Jessica Davidson has set out her novel in a very interesting way

1. Re-read Pg 42
2. Discuss the layout of this page. Why? Effective?

* Jessica Davidson has employed the use of brackets in some verses.

1. On Page 12 the use of brackets is introduced here.
2. Discuss the significant or purpose of these brackets?

* Re-read the following verses and suggest the possible reasons Davidson has used brackets:

- Pg 17 *Inside her mind*
- Pg 62 *So yeah*
- Pg 20 *The thin red line*

* On Pg 22, we see a shaded box. This shaded box soon becomes a feature of the novel.

1. Discuss with a partner what the purpose of this layout might be?
2. Report back to the class.

* Re-read *Wounded* (pg 57)

1. List the different descriptions of crying.
2. How effective is Jessica Davidson's use of language in this verse?



Symbols

*Re-read the following pages:

- Pg 82 - *Washed away*
- Pg 153 - *Jim/spin me right round*
- Pg 162 - *Holds her tight*

* Symbol of Water

1. Discuss the connotation of water and how it relates to the above pages.
2. Write an analytical essay on the topic:

* *The symbol of water is an effective symbol in WHAT DOES BLUE FEEL LIKE?*

Discuss.

* Symbol of Shadow

1. Discuss the symbol of the shadow in pg 255 - *English Assignment #5*

Keeping Track

- * Maintain a list of vocabulary you have not heard of or have not used before. Look these words up in the dictionary.
- * Maintain a 'plot line' for the novel. Constantly update this throughout your reading.
- * Keep track of the symptoms of Char's illness as you read.

Symptoms of Char's illness	Quotes to support

* Take notice of the relationship between Char and the other characters we are introduced to. Describe it. Maintain a list of information as we learn it in the table below:

What we learn about the relationship between Char and:	Page #
Mum	
Dad	
Tim	
Jim	
Bronwyn	
Lee	
Guy	

* Re-read *Julie/ feeling guilty* (pg 5)
 - Here we are given insight into Char's mum.

1. What does this tell us?

* Read *Growing up* (pg 3)

1. What does the reaction of Char's father and mother to Char getting her learners suggest about their relationship?

* What do we learn about Char's dad on (pg 12)?

* What do you think the significance of Remember? (pg 13) might be?

1. What might help the audience realize?

* Pg 25- *Low-Fat Version* by Bronwyn Mackay.

1. What do we learn about Bronwyn? Char?
 2. Complete a W Chart for the party as described by Bronwyn.

<i>W CHART (Ralph Pirozzo, 2003)</i>				
Looks like	Feels like	Sounds like	Tastes like	Thinks like



* Re-read *Jim says* (pg 31), *Jim* (pg 46) and *Natural Medicine* (pg 51).

1. What do we learn about the character of Jim

* Re-read *Reservoir* (pg 44) and *Jim* (pg 46)

1. What does this suggest about the effect Char has on others?

* Re-read *Char who?* (pg 72–73)?

1. Does Julie's perspective sound realistic to you?

* Re-read pg 136 - *Looking inside*

1. Why do you think Char only notices the bad 'stuff'?

2. Have you ever felt this way?

* Re-read pg 167-

1. What does Char begin to learn here?

* On page 182 Char asks: *What kind of world is this?*

1. What does this teach Char?

* What purpose does the character of Lee play in the novel?

1. Why does Char notice Lee's cuts? (pg 224)

2. Why do you think Char goes to Lee's mother? (pg 227)

* Re-read *Mum is worried* Pg 234

1. How does this counselling session contrast with her first session
Armed for Battle

* Compare Char's New Year's Eve on page 277 with page 1.

* Re-read *Real Men* (pg 149) and *Don't Tell Your Mother* (pg 150)

1. What does society tell boys a real man looks like?

2. How does this differ to Jim's father's advice?



Discussing the Themes

Depression/Suicide

*I can't escape
And I
Don't really know if I want to
I want it to
Be over, my whole life
Extinct.*

1. Have you ever felt this way?
2. Draw a picture of how Char is feeling (pg 1).

* Re-read *Deadly Concoctions* which documents Char's first attempt at suicide.

1. Have you ever read anything like this before? How did it make you feel?

* Re-read pg21- *Make it go away*

- There is a marked contrast between Char's feelings about herself and what Char's friends think about her.

1. Why do you think this happens?

* If you could write a letter to your inner worries and thoughts, what would it say?

1. Write this letter.
2. Do you think it would be a worthwhile process?



Mental Illness

* *And I can't help but wonder if [this blackness] will ever be fully gone?*
Pg 252

1. What do you know about mental illness/ depression/ bi-polar disorder?
2. What assumptions do you think society makes about people with mental illness?
3. Has reading this novel added to your knowledge and understanding?
4. What more can be done to make people more aware of and to have a better understanding of mental illness?
5. Research mental illness in your city/ town/ state.
What is your government's policy? Create a pamphlet which will appeal to teenagers and increase their understanding of mental illness.

Rites of Passage

* Re-read *At the Formal* (pg 250)

1. Are these realistic expectations of the school formal?
2. Was your school formal like this? How did it differ?

* Re-read *In a week* (pg 264)

1. What will the end of school feel like?
2. Do you think Jessica Davidson has captured the end of school realistically in this verse?

Friendship

* Re-read *Friends at School* (pg 4)

1. Does this represent the experience of you and your friends at school?
- Why/ Why not?
2. Do you think this is typical of most friendships at school?

* On Pg 278- Char says she wants to do more than just exist.

1. What do you think she means when she says this?
2. Do you think this is a good way to look at life? Why? Why not?



Abortion

* We read Char's reaction to her abortion on pg 79

1. Have you ever read anything like this before?
2. How did it make you feel?
3. Can you sympathise with Char?

* Pg 84 Drunken Talk- Chars discusses the abortion.

1. What do we learn here?

* Compare this with pg 228

*I can
talk about the abortion
without hating myself
without crying.*

Drugs

* Re-read pg 126 - *Something stronger?*-

1. Do you think this is typical?

*But if you do it enough
You convince yourself that you actually like doing it (pg 212)*

1. How accurate do you think this is for teenagers?

Choices

Just because a good person makes a bad choice, doesn't make them a bad person (pg 225)

1. How true do you think this statement is?
2. Make a list of the 'bad decisions' Char makes and the consequences she suffers as a result.
3. Compare this with other people in your class

* Write an analytical essay based on this quote analyzing the way in which Char develops throughout the novel. Be sure to analyse who and what events influence her journey.