

KS3 HE Bookclub

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson

• Discussion points

Genre:

Science Fiction - stories based on imagined future scientific or technological advances.

Dr J and Mr H: The science behind the story - using chemicals to physically change a person and separate their 'evil' side from the rest of them - is yet to exist.

Gothic Horror - a story with horror, death, suspense, supernatural underpinnings and often with a certain romance (as opposed to realism). There is usually some element of the past coming to haunt the present. Often set in castles, ruins, monasteries or dark, foggy, scary places.

Dr J and Mr H: Dark London streets, supernatural happenings,

Was designed to be a 'crawler', an astonishing story, with supernatural happenings, that means to excite and scare the reader in equal measure.

Mystery - Title

Case - gives it a professional edge, as if this isn't just some made up fantasy. Also gives the air of a mystery, as in a detective story.

Strange - everything is more than meets the eye, supernatural, not your straight forward, cold, rational answer.

Books of a similar genres that they may have already encountered:

Sci-fi and gothic horror - Frankenstein, Mary Shelley.

Gothic horror and mystery - Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte
The Hound of the Baskervilles, Arther Conan Doyle.

Satire of gothic horror - Northanger Abbey, Jane Austin

Person:

3rd Person - omniscient narrator

1st Person - The personal testimony - Letters from Jekyll and Dr Lanyon - makes everything more immediate and thrilling to the reader, slows the pace of the reveal

Tense: Past

Perspective/view point:

Mr Utterson

Testimonies - Jekyll and Lanyon

Setting:

London 19th century - dark, foggy streets

Plot of the story:

- Mr Utterson (lawyer) is walking with friend/relative, Mr Enfield. They pass a door which reminds Mr Enfield about an incident to which he was a witness.
- The incident - an extremely unpleasant man trampled down a young girl and left her screaming. The family and enraged bystanders held this man to account. They discovered his name was Edward Hyde, and made him pay £100 compensation. Hyde went through the same door Utterson and Enfield were passing by. Hyde paid £10 in gold and £90 in a cheque that was signed by Dr Henry Jekyll - a respected and well known doctor.
- Utterson was aware that Jekyll had made a will leaving everything to Hyde in the event of his death or disappearance. As Jekyll was a friend this worried Utterson, so he went to a mutual friend of theirs, Dr Lanyon. Lanyon was estranged from Jekyll because of professional differences.
- Utterson decided to find Hyde, by waiting outside the door. They talk - there is mutual dislike and suspicion.
- Utterson talks to Jekyll's butler, Poole, and finds out Hyde has complete access to Jekyll's house.
- Utterson finally talks to Jekyll about this at one of Jekyll's dinner parties. Jekyll does not want to discuss the matter but insists he wants Hyde to inherit everything.
- A year later, a maid witnesses Sir Carew meeting and then being beaten to death by Hyde. Utterson confronts Jekyll, who has a letter saying Hyde has gone forever. Jekyll starts mixing with friends again and doing good deeds.
- A little while later, Utterson sees Lanyon again who is on the verge of death, and Lanyon dies 3 weeks later. Lanyon leaves Utterson a letter that says it cannot be opened until Jekyll dies or disappears.
- Jekyll becomes reclusive again, and when Utterson sees him at his window, Jekyll's face suddenly contorts in terror and pain, at which point he disappears.
- Poole comes to Utterson's house, because he is concerned about the strange behaviour of Jekyll, whom he has not seen for over a week, but only gets instructions through the door, in a voice that is not his own - he fears Jekyll has been murdered, and the murder is hiding in Jekyll's laboratory. Utterson and Poole break down the door and find the body of Hyde, who has just drunk poison. They find no Jekyll, just a letter to Utterson.
- Utterson reads Lanyon's letter first and then Jekyll's. He discovers that Lanyon died because of the shock of seeing Hyde turn into Jekyll, and that Jekyll had been leading a double life. Jekyll had enjoyed leading one life that focused on earthly desires (Hyde) and one that had great respect (Jekyll), but ultimately Hyde became too strong for Jekyll and he could no longer control when he switched.

Context:

Robert Louis Stevenson born 13 November 1850 – 3 December 1894. (Died of Tuberculosis aged 44)

Science:

Science had been moving forward in leaps and bounds. For some it was starting to become the new religion.

Reason and intelligence were seen as the height of all things.

1859 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of the Species* was published - the first academic text to discredit the Genesis creation story.

Religion:

RLS was born into a Scottish Presbyterian (type of protestantism, but often associated with duty, lack of indulgence or frivolity) family.

Social Attitude towards children:

Laws to protect children were coming in: Factory Act (1833) and the Mines Act (1842)

1889 - Children's Charter, to protect children from parental abuse.

Growing emphasis on looking after the weak or those less fortunate than you - a sign of your great social standing as much as your care for human kind.

Morality:

Dual attitude towards morality.

Protestant values in Britain were strong, with a great emphasis on duty, as was reflected in the change of female necklines and increasing restrictions of the corset from the low cut, high waist of 1810s, to the chin high line of the Edwardians (1902 - start of WW1).

Moralist reflected in attire, attendance at church, being seen as 'proper', but actions in private contradict, with things like prostitution, opium dens and drug addiction being a major problem.

Hypocrisy was not seen as a problem

justified under the thinking that people can't help their animal desires as long as they always want to, that is enough.

Philanthropy seen as a major asset and was enough in itself to ensure power and respect.

It was also seen as morally good to preserve the reputation of the upper classes, because their morality was seen as the rock on which the rest of society was able to stand.

Superiority

Keeping slaves was banned in 1833, but there was still an attitude of some people being better than others.

some people just are better than others - no people of colour, of lower social ranks or females in charge - God made white, upperclass males better than everyone else.

Black - animal like and so inferior

lower class - stupid and lazy, which is why they are at the bottom, and 'stupid breeds stupid', so you can't move up from that. At the very bottom are the criminals and the thinking of a 'criminal gene' - come from a criminal, you are going to be a criminal.

women - smaller brains and overly emotional

the superior should remain in power no matter what.

Empire:

Victoria came to throne 1837. Throughout her reign she built up a very large empire.

Morality - 'civilised' behaviour - superiority: all closely linked

Prove your right to be in charge of the colonials because you are more 'civilised'. Your greater intellect dictates that you can make moral choices, unlike the natives.

It can generally be considered a time of: great contradiction and change
 discovery
 moral questioning

Themes:

Science vs religion

- Not a new theme, had been played with for quite some time: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, published 1818
- What was new was Charles Darwin
 - The animal part of ourselves versus the rational side of ourselves (often explored as 'rational man, irrational woman', e.g. Jane Eyre, 1847)

Morality

- RLS plays with the idea of the unmentionable evil acted out by Hyde, and uses that against the reader. What Hyde has done can only ever be as bad as the imagination of the reader, and that tended to be defined by society...
- 'Blackmail House is what I call that place with the door' - Enfield to Utterson, chp1.

At the time:

1885 - the 'blackmailers' charter was passed - a charter outlawing all homosexual acts between men

Blackmail and homosexuality were very closely linked at the time.

Jekyll's mention of having a "very great interest" in Hyde, would for many leave the suspicion of homosexual behaviour, which is why Hyde would be blackmailing him. - The RED HERRING, as we try and work out the relationship between J and H.

When Utterson suggests blackmail to Jekyll ("Make a clean breast of this in confidence; and I make no doubt I can get you out of it.") his response is, "but indeed it isn't what you fancy; it is not so bad as that." (Chp 3).

- Jekyll divorces his own morality from that of Hyde - but not completely as he does some moral off-setting, by trying to do good things when he is not Hyde.
- Hyde has no morality - but he does have reason and fear

Reputation

- Carew murder - why was he meeting Hyde in a dark and lonely street? - everyone is very careful to maintain his reputation
- Utterson - maintains everyone's reputation - almost prides himself on keeping secrets
- Hyde tries to maintain his by paying off the girl's family - "... killing being out of the question, we did the next best thing. We told the man we could and would make a scandal out of this."
 - Gets a housekeeper who keeps secrets
- Jekyll is keeping his secret from everyone and living the life he really enjoys without the repercussions

QUESTIONS:

- **Hyde** was given the name Hyde for a particular reason.
 - Why do you think that was?
 - Who is he trying to hide from? Himself, Jekyll, the part of Jekyll that Jekyll is trying to hide, on lookers, society
- **Jekyll** - Je if french for I. Kyll is an awful lot like kill. So it's I kill.
 - What do you think RLS was trying to get at by giving him this name?
- In the initial description of **Uttersson** at the start of the book, he is described as being extremely tolerant of other. '...inclined to help rather than reprove.' Is this a positive or a negative character trait?
- Utterson - to not 'utter' something is not to say anything. and during this novel he does not speak to the police about the connection between Hyde to Jekyll.
 - Why do you think that was? Protecting reputation of Jekyll, helping, not reproveing.
 - Is it a moral decision?
- Which character is the most moral?
- Which character is the most likeable?
- Thinking back to the idea of superiority. Why do you think RLS decided to give Hyde an air of disability/deformity?
- Hyde is also likened to an animal many times, 'ape-like sprite,' 'bestial,' hairy hands. How do you think that reflects his personality?
- If it was written now, who would be the older character, Jekyll or Hyde? Why?
- Did the description of Jekyll reflect his personality?
- Who was the real Jekyll?

Quick fire

- What did you enjoy?
- What did you hate?
- What could have been improved?
- Did it stay with you once you had finished reading it?
- Which copy has the best front cover?
- Would you pick it up unprompted based on either the title or the front cover?
- Does it remind you of any other books?
- What one word would you use to sum up the book?
- Would you recommend it to your friends (or enemies)?

Blue Dog, Louis de Bernières

• Discussion points

Genre:

Coming of age - Mick is growing up and learning to become a man.

Arguable also...

A 'feel good' story - heart-warming... sort of

Person:

3rd Person - omniscient narrator

Tense: Past

Perspective/view point:

Mick's

Setting:

Australia, late 70s

Plot of the story:

- Mick is sent to live in the outback with his 'granpa', as his father has died and his mother is suffering with a mental health condition.
- He has to adjust to the heat, dust, loneliness, home education, and building up a relationship with his grandpa and the locals.
- His Grandpa gives him a motorcycle. It is too big for him and difficult to ride, but it gives him freedom and a sense of achievement.
- A cyclone hits. In the floodwater Mick finds a puppy half drowned.
- Mick takes the pup home and his grandpa lets him keep it.
- His grandpa names it.
- The boy grows up with the dog and helps heal his sad heart.
- Mick discovers an aboriginal sacred cave, and he is warned away from going in there by Taylor Pete.
- A teacher, Betty, comes to help educate Mick. She is beautiful and everyone falls in love with her. She falls in love with Stemple.
- Mick tries to fight Stemple over Betty. Stemple gets angry and insults Mick's mum. Mick stabs Stemple in the back with a pencil.
- Mick runs away and hides in the sacred cave.
- Blue and Grandpa find him and take him home.
- Mick and Stemple both apologise to each other.
- Mick is told that his mother is out of hospital and is wanting him back.
- He has to leave everything he has built up behind again and go and live with her.

Context:

A novel based on a prequel film, Blue Dog.

Original story, Red Dog.

Louis de Bernière was asked if he would write the book based on the film script. He nearly didn't but liked the script so changed his mind. He had to complete it in three months and changed it quite a bit from the original script, as he felt that is what film people had done to Captain Corelli's Mandolin, another of his books, so he could do it here - fair is fair, if you will.

Red Dog is based on the true story of a kelpie - breed of Australian dog - bred for cattle rustling. Part dingo, so very hardy and designed for that landscape. Also very warm, inquisitive, intelligent, caring dogs.

LdeB is known for his picturesque, 'immersive fiction'. Before you pick up the book, if you know the author, you know that is what you are going to get.

- books are set abroad, e.g. Turkey, Latin America, Australia

LdeB is separated from partner and children, and a patrons for the 'Families Need Fathers' - campaign for equal child custody rights.

Set in seventies Australia, but written forty years later, 2016 - a change of social attitudes towards aboriginals and aboriginal culture.

Themes:

What it is to be a man

- Mick is being pushed to become a 'real man' - sport, working the land, standing up for yourself, overcoming machinery, the elements, the power of nature, learning to drink hard liquor, honour when fighting, going home to look after his mum.

Power of nature and the fluidity of state

- Nature will take everything in the end. Man can't stop it, but can over-come in and over-power it in the short-term, with enough intelligence.
- The cyclone - represents a big change in life. Bad thing to good things.

QUESTIONS:

- Why might you describe it as a bitter-sweet ending?
- Does it make any difference to you that it is very loosely based on a true story?
- How realistic do you think the story is?
- LdeB said the “book [was] aimed for 12 year olds, but read more by adults. How true do you think this is?
- How are women portrayed in this book? Betty: beautiful, gentle, intelligent, kind. Mick’s mum: gentle, easily broken, needs looking after.
- Does Blue’s name work for you?
- How easy are the characters to connect with?
- What does LdB do to try and bring you into the story? Beautiful, descriptive scenery, ‘authentic’ language, likeable characters, starting the lead character on the same journey as the reader - from the city into a completely unknown and inhospitable terrain.
- What influence might LdeB’s personal life have on the narrative?
- LdeB does a lot of research into a place, its history, culture, landscape etc. before he does a book. Do you think that was evident in this book?
- Do you think it was a realistic portrayal of life in the outback?
- There are many other books where a character struggles growing up away from their family, and takes a while to learn to adapt and find a sense of belonging. Can you think of any? Harry Potter, Jane Eyre, Oliver Twist (and many other Charles Dickens)
- Can you think of any other books where extreme natural weather conditions lead to a whole new state of being and change in journey for the protagonist? Wizard of Oz
- Mike has lost his father, was not allowed to attend the funeral, his mother is in hospital and is showing no sign of wanting to see him, he has been sent to live in the middle of nowhere with a man he barely knows, to a life that is vastly different from anything else he has ever experienced. Does Mick’s reaction to this situation ring true to you?
- If you could see this book written from another character’s perspective, which one would you like it to be?
- How well do you think LdeB tackled race relations in 1970s Australia?

Quick fire

- What did you enjoy?
- What did you hate?
- What could have been improved?
- Did it stay with you once you had finished reading it?
- Which copy has the best front cover?
- Would you pick it up unprompted based on either the title or the front cover?
- Does it remind you of any other books?
- What one word would you use to sum up the book?
- Would you recommend it to your friends (or enemies)?

Compare and contrast the two books:

- The depictions of manhood

J&H - Utterson, Lanyon, Poole: Duty-bound, in control of himself, discreet. Hyde: animalistic
Jekyll: a victim to his natural vices.

A man repressed is a man destined to become perverted.

BD - Granpa, Dad: butch, not frightened of anything, always stand up for himself, looks after others. Mick/Stamper: learning to control your animal instincts is part of becoming a man.
Neither book show any need for women. Society can function very well without them.

- The depictions of womanhood

J&H - Hyde's housekeeper: secretive, creepy, ineffectual. Jekyll's maid: hysterical, wet, scared.

BD - Mother: mad, weak, gentle to a fault. Betty: kind, sings like an angel, is looking for a man in her life

Women need protecting, and if they don't they're evil. Traditional roles - Virgin Mary and Eve and her apple.

- The depictions of animals in relation to man

J&H - There is no place for animals in the city, not even the ones inside of us.

BD - Blue: helps heal. They are fighting to survive just like people are. They are there to be eaten - waste nothing. Man is part of the animal world, not divorced from it. BUT there is no place for wild animals in the city.

- How is setting important in both these books?

J&H - Dark and foggy - both concealing the truth. All city and buildings, reflecting the 'man made' nature of the story - everything goes against nature.

BD - Harsh landscape reflecting how hard life can be, but also beauty within it - both have their ups and their downs. And as difficult as life might get, you learn to love it for what it is.

- Which is better, city or country?

J&H and BD: City is a place of civilisation and control.

BD: Country is a place where a person can pretty much be themselves

- How does light play a part in these books?

J&H - hide in shadows, maintains secrets

BD - stark light showing up stark truths, no gentling the harsh realities of life.

dark in cave - sacred - a secret Mike will never be in on as it is an aboriginal thing.

The crystal in the water - reaching for a beautiful truth and understanding, but it is always out of reach.

- What part do weather conditions play in the books?

J&H - fog, atmosphere, sense of secrecy and foreboding - the supernatural in a man-made, rational world

BD - the power of nature, determine the changes that come about, the constant battle to control the elements (the garden) or work around them. Shows the true 'smallness' of the characters and their lack of control over their own story line.

- How important is the context within which they are written for these books?

Both books are written quite specifically for their time and audience (BD may be set in the seventies, but behaviour and attitudes are much more 21st century), but both stories are quite universal and cross ages

- J&H: fighting inner demons. BD: learning to stand on your own two feet and appreciating the simple things, in an unfair world.

- How important is description in these two books?

Both have a hugely romantic air given to them in a large part through the descriptive language.

- Mick and Jekyll both have to master their inner 'animal', how well do you think they both managed it?

- How did those characters feel about that side of themselves?

J&H - shame and a certain arrogance

BD - shame, remorse

- How did you find they compared in reading style?

- How did they compare in terms of story enjoyment?

- How did they compare in terms of language?

- Would you say these books are more similar or different?

similar

Both about control of man over nature

Language that you often need to think about, or translate

Immersed in a time and place

Detailed and atmospheric descriptions

Heavily male character dominated

different

J&H: leaves questions unanswered, suspense, complex narrative - time chops and changes between testimonies, written from multiple people's perspective, moral component, drawn out ending

BD: everything nearly wrapped up, easy to follow narrative, everything follows chronologically, very fast ending