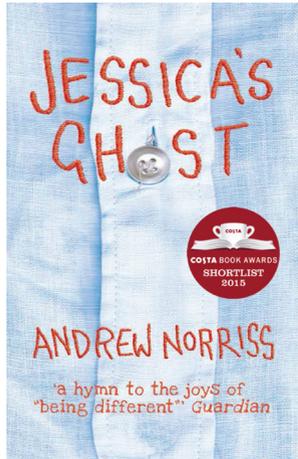


Jessica's Ghost

by Andrew Norriss

A Guide for Reading Groups



When Francis meets Jessica he finds a best friend, but the only thing is she's a ghost. Bullied at school for being different, Francis finds having Jessica around makes life just a little bit easier. Then when Francis makes two new friends – Andi and Roland – who also have trouble fitting in, the three of them try to discover how Jessica died and why they are the only people who are able to see her.

Main characters

- Francis** – a teenage boy who is interested in fashion and lives alone with his mum.
- Jessica** – the ghost of a teenage girl who doesn't know how she died.
- Andi** – a tough teenage girl who has been asked to leave her old school for fighting.
- Roland** – a teenage boy who has been bullied at his old school because of his weight.
- Quentin** – the boy who is bullying Francis.
- Grace** – Francis's mum who is widowed and works as a potter.

Key themes

- Friendship
- Difference
- Mental health
- Bullying
- Suicide

Questions for discussion

1. 'He had quite enough problems without claiming he could see dead people.' (page 14)

What problems does Francis have? How does Jessica begin to help him to deal with these?

2. 'What did puzzle her though was what she was supposed to do, now that she was dead.' (page 26)

What special abilities does Jessica have as a ghost? How has she spent her time since she died? What do you think Jessica is supposed to do?

3. Why did Quentin start to bully Francis? How does Francis react to being bullied? What would you do in his situation?

4. When Andi tells Francis, 'I've always envied people like you', Francis replies, 'I've always been a bit envious of people like you.' (page 91)

Why are Francis and Andi envious of each other?

5. Why do Francis, Andi and Roland all feel as if they stand out in some way? You may find it useful to think about:

- The things that make them feel different from other people.
- The way each character feels about this.
- How each character tries to copy with the situation.

6. What does Roland find out about how Jessica died? What effect does this have on Jessica?

7. 'Lorna was going to jump.' (page 201)

Why does Lorna want to commit suicide? How do Jessica and Francis help to prevent this?

8. 'He found it much harder to get used to being without Jessica. Andi and Roland missed her as well, but it was hardest for Francis.' (page 230)

How do you think Francis's life has been changed by his friendship with Jessica?

Activity

1. Create a book trailer for Jessica's Ghost. This trailer should interest potential readers and make them want to pick up the book. Take a look at examples of other book trailers and think about how you can use images, sounds, text and voiceover in your own book trailer. Some trailers include

dramatisations of scenes from the book whilst others use voiceover and images to convey the mood and plot of the book. You could always make a storyboard of your trailer and annotate this if you don't have access to a computer. Think about the following aspects of the book and how you could show these in the trailer:

- genre
- plot
- characters
- setting
- atmosphere

Further reading

- - *Up on Cloud Nine* by Anne Fine also explores the topic of suicide in a sensitive and thought-provoking way.
- Sarah Crossan's *Apple and Rain* shows a teenage girl coping with a difficult family situation.
- For another book about difference and acceptance, try *The Boy in the Dress* by David Walliams.

Find out more

'Each doll represents a particular style, you see? Fly-girl, punk, grunge...' (page 24)

Francis is fascinated by fashion. Find out more about the fashion designers and trends mentioned in the book. You could use this information to create an 'inspirations' book for Francis where he records his design ideas.