

# THE BOOK AND BEYOND

An educator's guide for exploring children's and YA literature

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**Title:** Oxygen Mask

**Author(s):** Jason Reynolds

**Illustrator(s):** Jason Griffin

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is for your thoughts, questions and notes about different aspects of the book and to consider how you might frame discussion with students.

## The book

### Physical object

- The paperback edition is a dense, heavy and chunky paperback with unusual curved corners. The edges of the pages appear sprayed — a smoky grey colour.
- The paper stock feels and looks heavy and smooth with a matte appearance in line with graphic novel conventions.
- It feels nice to hold and fits in the hand well.
- There is an elastic band bookmark attached to keep a place or hold the book closed. It almost feels like you've picked up someone else's journal

### Design & cover

- Cover image same as the first image in the book — narrator sitting on chair.
- Back cover is lined like an exercise book — reflects that the illustrator used an exercise book to create his artwork in.
- The title appears stamped, in upper case and yellow. The yellow ties in with the elastic band on the cover.
- The text on the cover is embossed and overglossed.
- Structured in distinct sections 'BREATH ONE, BREATH TWO ...' with a long stream-of-consciousness-style sentence making up each section.

### Illustration

- The colour palette is limited for effect — black, white, grey, with red and yellow highlights, occasional blues.
- The background to the illustrations is sometimes lined exercise book, sometimes painted-out existing text, and spaces with images overlaying — making it feel like a journal.
- Illustrations include: mixed-media collage, painted and pencil images, close-ups, part images, spray paint, grime, smudges, scratching out, thick paint, scribbles, appearance of crumpled pages, blackout of occasional pages or words. The effect is dark, moody, remixed, multimodal.
- Body text is printed on paper, cut out and stuck on with mixed lettering size.
- The image before the story starts, looks like a screen door or safety door. This may suggest the idea of entering the house and seeing behind closed doors.

### Characters

- Narrator — young man, observing, questioning and coming to understand what's happening in the world.
- Brother — playing video games endlessly.
- Mother — watches same TV channel all day long, news on repeat, seems to have given up.
- Father — endless coughing, very ill but insisting he'll be back to normal soon.
- Sister — on phone with friends — connecting to the outside world.
- The family are separated within the confines of the flat. They appear disconnected and clearly trapped by what is going on in their lives and the world.

### Plot

- The action and arc centre on a family at home during COVID-19 lockdown. Sweltering heat and repeated news add to the tension.
- From the point of view of the narrator as he tries to interact with his family and make sense of the changes — illness, protest, family discontent.

### Setting

- Clearly set in 2020 — the days of COVID-19 lockdown and protest in the US.
- We enter a home in isolation; a small apartment in a loud, dirty city.
- With the oppressive summer heat, climate change is evident.
- Noisy environment — TV, radio, video game, coughing.
- All contribute to the atmosphere, mood, the sense of confinement and tension.

### Theme & message

- A commemoration and contemplation of the impact of COVID-19.
- Also highlights:
- Climate change.
  - Racial injustice.
  - Internal conflict — identity and place.
  - Power and/or lack of power — media, society and family relationships.
  - The importance of connection with people, places, experiences and things.
  - Anxiety.

### Language

- Metaphorical and literal — it is hard to breathe in a world in crisis.
- Poetic techniques unfolding the themes: repetition, alliteration within short clauses or on one page, symbols and imagery — fire, water, restrictions.
- Reading aloud recommended for full appreciation of language.
- The language of illustration emphasises the mood and theme: water images repeated and the use of black and blank pages, repeated — a sense of suffocation.
- The novel begins in the middle of a sentence — gives sense of immediacy, we've been dropped into the middle of the action.

### Mood & feeling

- Dark, suffocating, hopelessness, loneliness, isolation, entrapment.
- Varied pace draws us in and echoes the mood of the narrator.

### Genre & format

- Graphic novel.
- This book was originally published as *Ain't Burned All the Bright* a standard large hardback.
- This new version states on the cover that it is a graphic novel. Interestingly, it also won the 2022 Boston Globe-Horn Book Picture Book Award.

## Rich question(s)

This section is for creating and exploring questions that might guide an overall inquiry for a particular book. These questions might be inspired by ideas in the book section and/or personal responses and/or the NZ Curriculum and/or available resources.

What is freedom?

How does power or a lack of power affect an individual?

Why do people protest?

What is the place of literature/art in effecting social change?